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(by Alan Harris)

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International Internal Discussion Bulletin

volume X **number** 23 November 1973

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price 30 cents

PREFACE by the rossdowson.com website editor:

British Trotskyist Alan Harris became a leading member of the Canadian S.E.L. in Toronto in the late 1950s.

Taking on a cross-Canada leadership role in the L.S.A. in the early 1960s, the Canadian movement then assigned Harris to help found the British L.S.A. upon the sectarian collapse of the previous British Section of the F.I., the S.L.L. (In this period, Toronto LSA leader Keith Locke returned to his native New Zealand to help found the L.S.A. in that country)

After all, these three countries shared the phenomenon of the British Labour Party – the mass reformist union-based labor party, and it was the Canadian movement which had developed the most sophisticated revolutionary orientation to such parties as practised in the New Democratic Party and its predecessor the C.C.F. in Canada for decades.

By 1973, with the self-imposed isolation of the S.L.L. from the F.I., Alan Harris as a British delegate however found himself increasingly in opposition as well, to the F.I.'s adaptation to the European youth culture's ultraleftism. How these policies adversely affected the newly formed British section's work in the BLP is detailed in a pamphlet "The Labour Party, Which Way" (citations from which appear below).

Harris documents how the F.I.'s politics permeated the new British Section, the I.M.G, leading to its slide into sectarianism. Readers will note how the degeneration of the I.M.G. paralleled developments in Canada, where the L.S.A. succumbed to youth and student-based ultraleft sectarian tendencies in this country, enjoying F.I. support. (By 1974, the Canadian forces in which Harris had matured broke from the L.S.A. in 1974 to form the Forward.Group (initially called the Socialist League), supporting the Fourth International to maintain the Trotskyist proletarian orientation to the mass labor party.)

GLOSSARY

S.E.L. Socialist Educational League, Canadian Section 1955-1960 of the F.I. (Fourth International, successor to the RWP 1945-1953 and various formations since 1932 (publishing journals through to 1938 and illegal bulletins through WW2 to 1944)

L.S.A. League for Socialist Action (successor to the SEL) from 1961, Section of the F.I. in Canada)

S.L.L. Socialist Labour League, former British Section F.I. led by Gerry Healy,

I.M.G. International Marxist Group, British Section from late 1960s

S.L. (F.G.) Socialist League, which broke from the L.S.A. in 1974, formed to maintain the continuity of the Canadian movement, from 1977 known as the Forward Group, publishing the monthly *Forward*.

International Socialism: journal of the British "State capitalist" tendency which holds that the Soviet Union and Cuba, etc. are not workers states but some form of capitalist state collectivism, therefore under no obligation to be defended by revolutionary socialists.

Militant: journal of the "deep entrist" Trotskyist tendency within the British Labour Party which curtail advocacy of their full program in order to retain membership in the BLP.

How the 'Ninth World Congress Turn' Misdirected the Work of the International Marxist Group, British Section of the Fourth International

By Alan Harris

At the 1969 world congress a minority of delegates argued that the ultraleft orientation adopted by the majority would not only lead to disaster in Latin America but could not be confined to that one continent. If persisted in, the line would logically be extended both programmatically and geographically.

Despite protestations from the majority that this would not happen, the development of the British section of the Fourth International since then has proved the contrary. This document will draw a balance sheet of some key events within the International Marxist Group over the past three to four years to indicate how the incorrect method projected in the line of the majority resolution on Latin America has been put to work in Britain.

The policies and activities of the IMG since it was recognized as the British section in 1969 shows that the turn made at the last world congress has the same negative effects whether it has been applied within a colonial or semi-colonial continent like Latin America or to an advanced capitalist country such as Britain. The adaptation to ultraleftism its inspires and ratifies results in a move away from principled politics, a tendency toward revision of program, and defaults in party building.

To be sure, the British section has not suffered the same kind of losses and defeats as the POR (González) or the PRT (Combatiente). Nonetheless, the balance sheet shows that over the past four years in adapting to the moods of the youth radicalization the IMG has moved in an ultraleft and sectarian direction. After the last world congress we gave up our previously held mass action perpective for our solidarity work in defense of the Vietnamese revolution. Despite the central importance of Ireland for the British revolution we have failed abysmally to do any meaningful work to aid the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination. The rejection of the Leninist position on the Labour Party and our sectarianism toward the mass organisations of the working class have isolated us from the mass struggles developing wthin the working class. We have failed to give leadership to the struggles of women, students, immigrants and to win the maximum recruits these struggles make possible. We rejected the analysis and tasks of the youth radicalisation made by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International in 1969. The transitional programme and the Leninist concept of the party have been attacked and revised.

This has disoriented and miseducated our cadres and led to a fragmentation of the section. At the April 1973 national conference of the section there were six organised tendencies — none of which was able to win a majority. Five of these tendencies claimed to support the European perspectives document yet were unable to agree on how to implement its line in Britain! This has prevented us from making the gains for Trotskyism which the sharpening class struggle has opened up for us in the past three to four years.

The IMG has faced specific and difficult problems since it was formed in 1968. These were due primarily to the break in continuity of Trotskyist leadership and by the loss of cadres suffered through many years of "entryism *sui generis*." Many young revolutionists were required to take on the responsibilities of leadership immediately on joining the section. Coming primarily from the student youth and lacking experiences in the broader class struggle, they brought into the organisation ultraleft concepts.

Given this situation the international leadership had a unique opportunity and responsibility to assist the new section in developing a correct understanding of the transitional programme and the Leninist theory of party building. In this way the section would have been educated in principled politics and equipped to resist and fight all alien pressures, to overcome impatience and reject shortcut methods in party building.

The majority international leadership, however, was not able to give the IMG the correct political guidance, since the line it had adopted in the "Resolution on Latin America" was itself an adaptation to ultraleftism and a turn away from the method of the transitional programme.

It is within the framework of the turn taken at the last world congress that the ultraleft and sectarian developments in the IMG have to placed.

VIETNAM: a promising start— 1966-69

In the years immediately preceding the 1969 world congress a promising new start was made to rebuild the British section of the Fourth International. A few comrades did essential and successful work in building mass actions in solidarity with the struggle of the Vietnamese people for self-determination.

With the cooperation of the Betrand Russell Peace Foundation we initiated and built the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC). The VSC was a single-issue, nonexclusive, united-front-type coalition. Its central aim was to organise mass mobilisations in the streets in solidarity with the struggle of the Vietnamese people, in opposition to American imperialism and against British complicity.

It was not easy to realise this aim. The British "peace movement" had traditionally been in the hands of the Stalinists and pacifists (e.g. the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament movement, which had organised the mass Aldermaston marches in the late fifties and early sixties). But in appealing primarily to the radicalising youth, the VSC successfully cut across the peaceful coexistence line of the Stalinists and pacifists. The first actions of the VSC were small but laid the base for bigger demonstrations and rallies which followed. Our small forces became the dominant political tendency within the VSC, and on 27 October 1968, 100,000 people took over the streets of London to express their hostility to the war and their support for the Vietnamese people. The October 1968 demonstration was the biggest anti-imperialist demonstration seen in Britain for decades and shook the ruling class. The preparations for the demonstration and its success were no mean achievement, taking into consideration the small size of the Trotskyist forces giving leadership to the VSC.

Throughout the preparation for the demonstration it was necessary to struggle against both the ultralefts and the conservative elements attracted to the VSC. Many political battles were fought and won. We won the fight against the Maoist ultralefts who wanted to take the VSC in a sectarian direction and who wanted confrontations with the police—not to do so was in their opinion a waste of revolutionary potential. We won the fight against the independents, many of whom got tired of marching and sought to turn the VSC away from its single-issue character into a broad anti-imperialist front which would give less and less attention to the issue of Vietnam. We won the fight against the reformist line of "negotiations" and succeeded in forcing the YCL (Young Communist League, the youth organization of the Communist Party) and other left groups to come into the coalition which organised the mass demonstration.

Only by taking on these opponents and politically defeating them were we able to carry the October 1968 demonstration. In this process a number of important gains were made in the building of the revolutionary party. We established a national identity and prestige amongst the left forces far beyond our numerical strength. The Stalinists were on the defensive, having lost their initiative on this issue. The YCL like the IS (International Socialists) and other left groups were obliged to join in and participate in the mass actions. At the same time we successfully isolated the Maoists. Their "counter demonstration" on 27 October 1968 attracted less than 3,000.

Our call for a mass peaceful demonstration stood in sharp contrast to the ultraleft "confrontationist" line of the Maoists. Tariq Ali, the leading spokesperson for the IMG and VSC, explained our policy clearly at a press conference held on October 21 when he said: "We don't want any mindless militancy. We don't want any confrontations with the police." He repeated this position again on the BBC radio programme "The World This Weekend" broadcast on the day of the demonstration: "We have made our position absolutely clear. We want it to be a very peaceful march in Central London and to end in Hyde Park with a rally. We are asking marchers on our march not to go to Grosvenor Square."

The reason why Tariq Ali advocated the demonstration should not go into Grosvenor Square (where the American Embassy is located), was because it was thought that the police could easily trap several thousand demonstrators in the square and provoke a confrontation (which is what they did on the previous VSC demonstration).

To prevent the possibilities of this happening our policy was to avoid taking the demonstration through Grosvenor Square and instead march direct to Hyde Park for a mass rally. By vigourously projecting the demonstration as peaceful in intent, we successfully countered the Maoist and police propaganda that a confrontation was "inevitable." Thousands of people joined the action on this basis.

The Healyites, who did not participate, were under such pressure that they felt compelled to issue a leaflet to the 100,000 demonstrators explaining "Why We are Not Marching." In keeping with their sectarian and insular politics they tried to dismiss the VSC as a "petty bourgeois protest movement." (The Vietnamese, however, had quite a different evaluation of the 1968 demonstration and gave it considerable publicity in their press.)

The mass-action perspective is abandoned

We made a number of new recruits from our work in defence of the Vietnamese revolution, the most prominent being Tariq Ali. Our comrades gained invaluable experience in building united-front-type coalitions, in defending our ideas against our opponents, in learning about the dynamics of mass action and the tactics to be followed in order to keep the coalition together on a principled basis and to bring in new forces. There is no doubt that more substantial gains could have been made if we had continued working along these lines.

Unfortunately after the 1968 demonstration, the majority leadership began to turn away from its previously held orientation to the Vietnamese struggle and its perspective of building a mass-action campaign. The October 1968 demonstration was the last action of any significance organised in Britain in solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle for self-determination.

Less than 18 months after such a massive and historic demonstration, in January 1970 at the time of Wilson's visit to Washington, D. C., we had given up our mass-action perspective in favour of a small demonstration consisting of a small proportion of "the vanguard." Discussions in our leadership centred around organising a siege of Downing Street (the residence of the Prime Minister) to protest his trip to the USA. However, on the day of the demonstration the relationship of forces between us and the police made it clear that for such an action to be successful many more forces than the "vanguard" were needed. A week later (after Wilson had arrived in North America) we joined a sectarian march and rally organised by the Healyite Socialist Labour League to "Stop Wilson Going to Washington" and agreed to Tariq Ali speaking from Healy's platform.

Some months later we attempted to form through the VSC a coalition to organise a demonstration for 31 October 1970. By this time we were reluctant to work with forces to the "right" of us. Our image had become ultraleft and the VSC had been reduced to a shell. We could only attract hardened ultraleft and anarchist currents. These forces took over the organising committee. Realising that we could not take responsibility for an action which they organised, we were forced to abandon the 31 October demonstration. A year later, we gave up any attempt to build a united-front-type committee and organised our own torchlight parade which attracted around 100 people and marched through London for an hour or so calling for "victory to the NLF." This token action no doubt satisfied most of the participants but was completely ineffective in doing anything to aid the Vietnamese revolution, let alone secure a victory for the NLF.

As we dumped our mass-action orientation, it became a *principle* to make the key demand for solidarity action "Victory to the NLF." This slogan, which led us to adopt a sectarian stance, was considered by "the vanguard" to express a position of solidarity with the Vietnamese revolution. Our insistence on it isolated us from many forces who took a principled solidarity position—the right of self-determination for the Vietnamese people—and who were prepared to demonstrate for withdrawal of American troops and for an end to British complicity in the war.

By April 1972, when the Vietnamese were at a crucial stage in the long struggle against imperialist aggression, we had not only abandoned the concept of building mass actions in defense of the Vietnamese revolution but found it difficult to carry out even a token action.

We did not bother to print in the *Red Mole* either the statement of the United Secretariat or the call from NPAC (National Peace Action Coalition in the USA) for international solidarity actions on 22 April. Elsewhere, however, more than 23,000 marched in Sweden in demonstrations in 47 cities, the biggest demonstration being in Stockholm, where 11,000 participated. In Helsinki 5,000 people marched; in Paris 25,000; and in Berlin 10,000. In Brussels 2,000 attended a teach-in, and 2,500 demonstrated in Liege. In Zurich 25,000 marched. Several thousand demonstrated in Spain. In Australia over 20,000 demonstrated and in North America tens of thousands took part in demonstrations and rallies.

What was the response in Britain and how successful were British Trotskyists in mobilising support in defense of the Vietnamese revolution at such a crucial stage in the war? The answer to this question is to be found in the *Red Mole* editorial 15 May 1972. "Whereas in the rest of western Europe tens of thousands of militants came out on the streets last month in solidarity with Indochina, in Britain action was restricted to a puny meeting organised by the IMG in London and a slightly larger demonstration in Glasgow." That the IMG meeting in London was "puny" is indisputable. With Tariq Ali billed as the main speaker, the meeting attracted about 50 persons, many less than the membership of the London branch. Apart from Glasgow comrades who supported the Tendency, an organised minority within the IMG, and who were actively involved in building the April 22 Indochina Committee, which organised a demonstration of 500 in Glasgow, no attempt was made to build a united-front-type action in any other part of Britain.

Tailending the 'vanguard'

Was the majority leadership of the IMG taken unawares, with no time to organise more than the "puny" token action? The *Red Mole* editorial on 17 April makes it clear that this was not the case:

"For many months now the Fourth International has been stressing the need for international mobilisations this spring, in response to a situation known to be reaching boiling point. In particular, in the United States through the NPAC and in France through the Indo-China Solidarity Front, our comrades have taken the lead in mobilising a large scale for the International Day of Solidarity on the 22nd of April realising that the Spring of 1972 would be an important period in the developing Indo Chinese revolution."

The editorial in *Red Mole* 15 May confirmed the initiatives taken by comrades in the International.

"The militants of the Fourth International have all over the world organised actions in recent months to stress the importance of the Vietnamese struggle. Paris and New York are but two powerful examples."

What accounts then for the British section's lack of response? The *Red Mole,* sensitive to the lack of response in Britain, came up with the following reasons in its editorial of 17 April 1972:

"What we can do is relatively small both because of the lack of Internationalism of most left groups and also because for us the major task must be the building of a solidarity campaign in support of the struggle of the Irish people against *our own* ruling class."

British Trotskyists do have a responsibility to build a mass solidarity campaign in support of the struggle of the Irish Catholics against British imperialism. This is a key question and a major task for the British section. But it is incorrect to suggest that the building of such a campaign cuts across the building of solidarity actions in defense of the Vietnamese revolution. Building a solidarity campaign in support of the struggle of the Irish people should have made it easier, not harder, to mobilise in support of the struggle of the Vietnamese people. The increased tempo of the class struggle at that time, which was reflected in struggles such as those around the Irish question, industrial issues and student union autonomy, should have made it easier for us to organise solidarity actions in defence of the Vietnamese revolution as compared with the late sixties.

The argumentation of the *Red Mole* might sound revolutionary to some, but in reality it is nothing more than a rationalisation for turning our backs on the Vietnamese revolution.

Additional reasons for our inability to build solidarity actions for April 22nd were outlined by the *Red Mole*'s editorial 15 May:

". . . the fact that while in most European countries (including Spain) the groups of the extreme left are dominated by revolutionary internationalists, in Britain there is a tremendous insularity and chauvinism even in the ranks of the revolutionary movement. This was rationalised by some groups arguing that marches, demonstrations on anti-imperialist issues were pointless and the only way the Vietnamese could be helped was by working towards a revolution in Britain: i.e. doing nothing. This, coupled with a general belief that Nixon was ending the

was because of the pressures at home made Vietnam seem irrelevant to many revolutionaries."

It is true that sections of the left are insular and chauvinistic. This is nothing new and only reinforces the necessity for Trotskyists to fight even harder to win support for the Vietnamese revolution. As has already been pointed out, when the IMG was less than 100 strong in the years 1966-68 it set an example to the British left and forced the YCL, CP students, IS and others into united actions in defence of the Vietnamese. It is true that after October 1968 many antiwar activists (including some leading members of the IMG) wrongly thought that marches and demonstrations on anti-imperialist issues were pointless; that while it was correct to mobilise students on the Vietnam issue when the workers were relatively passive, it was a waste of time and energy given a rise in working class militancy; and that Nixon would quickly bring the war to an end.

These are not the reasons, however, for the IMG's failure to organise actions in defence of the Vietnamese revolution. The IMG initially fought against these ultraleft and sectarian forces who considered the Vietnamese revolution to be "peripheral" to the class struggle, who wanted to move away from a single-issue campaign and turn the VSC into a broad anti-imperialist campaign as a substitute for the revolutionary party, who were tired of marching, who saw no purpose in mobilising 100,000 people (some of whom were liberals, reformists, and pacifists).

We published a special edition of *The Week* (the predecessor of the IMG journal, *International*), Vol. 9 No. 11, March 1968, entitled "Vietnam and The Left, An Answer to Some Critics." One of the contributions in this publication is the speech given by Comrade Pat Jordan at the London Vietnam Rally, 22 October 1967. Before an audience of tens of thousands of supporters of the Vietnamese struggle, Pat Jordan stated:

"I want to address myself to one topic only: 'What can we do best to assist the people of Vietnam to defeat American imperialism.' First, and most obvious, we must build up the movement in this country which takes the line of American withdrawal because this is the most principled and most effective way of opposing the war."

He also made reference to the radicalising effect of the Vietnamese struggle on youth throughout the world:

"Comrades, we owe a great debt to the Vietnamese people. Their heroic example, their determination to fight to the end against American imperialism, their noble courage has inspired us all. All over the world young people have been won for anti-imperialism, for socialism by the strength of this example. Our debt is deep, let us repay it. Let us go forward from this meeting to make one of the most militant anti-imperialist demonstrations Britain has ever seen."

The October 1968 demonstration in London was supported by over 100,000 people, bearing out the correctness of the line put forward by Comrade Jordan.

Whereas prior to 1968 we fought against the critics of our mass-action perspective for the solidarity struggle, the majority leadership subsequently gave up the struggle against the erroneous concepts of our political opponents on this issue. Instead of fighting them, the IMG majority leadership ended up by adapting to them. This is the political reason why we stopped seeing Vietnam as a key issue. We wrongly thought that the Vietnamese struggle no longer was a major issue for the youth radicalisation; that with the rise of workers struggles the youth were no longer able to be mobilised on anti-imperialist issues; and gave up our previously held mass-action perspective, stopped building broad united-front-type coalitions, and tail-ended the "vanguard" instead of leading it.

This meant that in practice we turned our backs on the Vietnamese revolution, let the labour bureaucrats off the hook, allowed left groups to return to their old insular positions, and enabled the CP to regain the initiative on the Vietnam issue.

YOUTH: radicalisation expected to end

At the April 1970 IMG National Conference, the building of a Trotskyist youth organisation was projected as the central task and as a prerequisite for the section making gains in the next period. Although it was not at all clear what the practical political work of the new youth organisation would be (since the IMG itself was not clear, having just abandoned the Vietnam solidarity work which had been the central focus of the organisation from 1966-1968), the decision to set up a youth organisation was a correct one.

The creation of a Trotskyist youth organisation was quite realistic and indeed very necessary. With the continuation and deepening of the youth radicalisation, particularly amongst students, there was an objective basis for an independent revolutionary-socialist youth organisation in Britain. A Trotskyist youth organisation had the possiblity of becoming a strong pole of attraction to radicalising youth, offering them an organisation in which they could further their understanding of Marxist theory and practice without demanding of them the total commitment required to join the section. Such a youth organisation had the potential of organising and leading the struggles affecting their generation. It would also recruit on a big scale and begin to train Trotskyist cadres who would later join the IMG.

The Spartacus League was formed furing the summer of 1970 and soon provided evidence of the great possibilities that existed in Britain for the building of a Trotskyist youth organisation to complement the work of the section. Even apart from the confusion around the precise political orientation of the work of the Spartacus League, within a matter of months it had around 200 members and had formed several local branches.

Despite this promising start, however, less than one year later the IMG majority leadership decided that it was necessary to dissolve the Spartacus League by fusing it with the section! The main political motivation given for this step was that there was a general downturn in the youth radicalisation:

"In the period under review there has been a downturn in youth radicalisation . . . One of the principal reasons for this is the coming to the centre of the stage of the workers struggles. This has, so to speak, taken away the automony of the youth radicalisation." (*No! We Haven't Got All the Time in the World,* National Committee Perspectives Document, April 1971.)

Thus, within a year the IMG majority leadership abandoned its earlier correct view that the youth radicalisa-

tion had opened up the necessity for a Trotskyist youth organisation. It advocated the fusion of the Spartacus League and the IMG since, they argued, the youth radicalisation as a whole was on a downturn.

The youth radicalisation in Britain reaches new peaks

In order to assess the extent of this error, it is necessary to examine the facts. It is important to bear in mind that during the two years following the 1971 national conference of the IMG, when the decision to give up the Spartacus League was made, the biggest and broadest student actions ever seen in Britain took place.

At the end of 1971, the Tory government launched an attack on the right of students to democratically dispose of their own student union funds without being responsible to either the local college authorities or the law courts. The students responded by forcing, in January 1972, an Emergency Conference of their nearly 500,000 member National Union of Students (NUS) (which is led by the Communist Party) and mobilised a 30,000-strong demonstration in London, closing down virtually every major higher educational establishment in the country.

Large numbers of students were active in giving support to the miners' militant strike that spring. In addition to collecting funds and engaging in solidarity demonstrations, many students utilised their university facilities to aid the miners. Students were also the main group in the large actions that took place in solidarity with the Irish people, following the massacre of 13 unarmed civil rights demonstrators in Derry.

In this period, too, new and important struggles were also beginning in the high schools in Britain. Students from some of London's biggest comprehensive schools (which draw their students predominantly from the working class) had walked out of their classrooms demanding an end to canings and detentions, for the right not to wear compulsory uniforms, and for other democratic rights.

All of these actions took place before the May 1972 IMG/Spartacus League (SL) Fusion Conference! If a simple misestimate was involved, why was the error not corrected in time? Why was the fusion that liquidated the youth organisation permitted to take place?

Adaptationism: the roots of the present student line

The majority leadership's Perspectives Document at the 1971 National Conference of the IMG argued that there were three factors contributing to the alleged downturn in the youth radicalisation. These reasons are worth examining in greater detail, for they reveal how an entirely wrong approach was beginning to emerge in the thinking of the IMG majority leadership and was quickly crystallising into a schema or dogma. This new approach amounted to orienting to the concerns of a thin layer of already radicalised youth and not to the objective needs of the broad struggles that were breaking out.

The first reason for the alleged downturn of the youth radicalisation was as follows:

"(1) a number of demoralising defeats which had been inflicted on the students. In particular they had been shown to be incapable in many instances of defending themselves against attack. The latest example of this being the expulsion of Rudi Dutschke and other foreign militants." (*No! We Haven't Got All the Time in the World.*)

When news of the threatened expulsion of Dutschke became known, members of the National Union of Students (NUS) in the Cambridge area organised a London demonstration and rally in Trafalgar Square. This received broad support and sympathy. The speakers at the rally were student leaders, Members of Parliament, and other persons who believed Dutschke had the right to remain in Britain. The Spartacus League (SL) was not involved in the formal preparations of the demonstration and rally but organised a contingent of its members and supporters to take part in the protest.

At the rally the small SL contingent under the ledership of Tariq Ali did its utmost to shout down and prevent from being heard those speakers who were not considered to be motivated by revolutionary aims. In particular, the Labour MP came under heavy fire in the SL's attempt to prevent this reformist from speaking out in defence of Dutschke's civil rights.

Our intervention at the united-front rally got some press publicity which strengthened the ultraleft image that the SL had been developing. Our sectarian actions at the rally isolated us from the several thousand participants who, though not necessarily agreeing with the political views of Dutschke, wanted him to have the right to stay in Britain.

In order to stop the Tories throwing Dutschke out of the country, it was necessary to build a broad defence campaign able to put sufficient pressure on the government to lift the ban. It was our responsibility as Trotskyists to promote and build such a campaign. Instead, we *accepted* as inevitable that Rudi Dutschke would be expelled and substituted revolutionary rhetoric for the building of a campaign in defence of his civil rights. Students left the rally without any perspective of building a strong defence campaign for Dutschke and without the understanding that the SL could be looked to for leadership in defending them against further victimisations by the ruling class.

Another major reason put forward by the majority for giving up the youth organisation was:

". . . the decline of the anti-imperialist movement particularly of VSC. An important element here has been the irresponsibility and sectarianism of other tendencies which have abandoned the duties on this front. However, this is by no means the whole story: the rise of the industrial struggle, the conscious policy of the Nixon administration of defusing the anti-war movement, the way the capitalist press has played down anti-imperialist struggles, etc. is all woven into the process." (Ibid.)

This leaves out of account the balance sheet of our work on Vietnam outlined earlier. It was only because of the correct line and activities of a few Trotskyists in the years 1966-68 that the other left tendencies were forced out of their insularity and into activity in defence of the Vietnamese revolution. Why would we expect them to continue this Vietnam solidarity activity once we had changed our line? By abandoning our own responsibilities for this work we took the pressure off them!

The chief reason advanced by the IMG majority leader-

ship for the alleged downturn in the youth radicalisation was the following:

". . . the shifting of the main focus of the struggle to the industrial front, especially the fight against the (Industrial Relations) Bill. This has reinforced the 'workerist' tendencies amongst students and made wide layers feel that their struggles in centres of education is irrelevant." (Ibid.)

It is certainly true that "workerist" tendencies are prevalent among the radicalising youth. The deepest radicalisation has taken place among the student youth who are greatly influenced by petty-bourgeois ideology. But the fact that students turned toward the workers struggles when they began to develop was very positive and bore out the analysis made in the 1969 United Secretariat resolution on "The Worldwide Youth Radicalisation and the Tasks of the Fourth International." The need for students to look for a powerful ally in the working class demonstrated that, in coming to grips with the immediate crisis in the universities and colleges, many students quickly came to realise that the education crisis is only a part of the deepening objective crisis of capitalism.

The main problem that faced us was how to combat "workerist" inclinations. The correct way was to build a strong Marxist youth organisation and strive to win the leadership of the struggles in which the youth were becoming radicalised. But this was not what the IMG majority leadership attempted to do. Instead of countering the political weaknesses of the youth, they catered to them. The real reason for abandoning the youth organisation was that the IMG majority leadership were adapting its politics to the political backwardness of this thin layer of already radicalised student youth.

The politics of the IMG were more and more oriented to the concerns of this "vanguard" layer and so became oblivious to the actual radicalisation process that was taking place. Instead of combatting the idea that Vietnam was no longer so important, given the rise of workers struggles, or that the student struggles were no longer relevant, the IMG majority leadership itself began to foster these erroneous concepts.

The struggle of the high-school students provides an illuminating example. The majority leadership were not at all excited about the new struggles beginning in the high schools. The demands of these young students were essentially democratic in character and had a powerful dynamic. But the IMG/SL majority leadership were oriented toward the "vanguard" students (that is, those students who had already developed a conscious anticapitalist outlook) and, therefore, it did not regard the majority of these protesting students as potential recruits to the SL.

In their indifference to the demands of the high-school students, the IMG/SL majority leadership rejected the concept underlying the transitional programme and method: that revolutionists must play a key role in helping to develop a revolutionary consciousness of those drawn in struggle. We should have intervened to help our high-school comrades work out a series of democratic and transitional demands for the high-school revolt that would enable them to lead it forward. Our abstention from this struggle enabled the ultraleft Maoists to take the leadership, and it was not long before the educational authorities were able to isolate them and keep the lid on the militant school students movement.

Student mass-action perspective is abandoned

Instead of a downturn in the youth radicalisation, the facts show that since the last world congress the worldwide youth radicalisation has been reinforced by the rise of workers struggles. In France, Belgium, Greece, Spain, Italy, Sweden and Germany there has been a significant resurgence of the student movements.

In Britain the student radicalisation has centred on two issues: student union autonomy and, more recently, student grants. Both of these issues have mobilised and begun to politicise tens of thousands of students in Britain.

Far from correcting the erroneous projection that the youth radicalisation was on a downturn, the 1972 National Committee "Document on Student Work" reasserts the decline of the student radicalisation. "The current radicalisation of the working class," it announces quite forcefully, "has removed the last vestiges of autonomy from the student movement."

Moreover, it carries this position to its logical conclusion and denies that students can go into action at all, except on an explicitly anticapitalist understanding. "Conjuncturally," the document asserts, "the different layers of students can come together on a whole variety of issues. But this unity can only be forged through a common political understanding not through an appeal to some 'student interests'."

The essence of this position is that it is politically incorrect to project a series of specific demands for the student movement.

This line is the opposite of the method of the transitional programme, which requires Trotskyists to identify with and intervene in the struggles actually taking place and where possible to give leadership to them. In rejecting the method of the transitional programme, the IMG majority leadership put forward a sectarian approach aimed solely at those who are already politicised and ignores the pressing question of providing leadership for the broad student mass who are just beginning to go into struggle. Lumbered with this sectarian line, it was not possible to take advantage of the big openings amongst students over the past two years.

The line leads to disaster

The Tory government's attack on student unions at the end of 1971 ushered in a new and higher stage in the British student movement. But our approach to this struggle was based on the consciousness of a thin layer of student radicals and not on the needs of the broader student mass. As the *Red Mole* explained (29 November 1971),

"For the moment the central message that the SUs are under attack has come across to the majority of students. But this can mean all things to all men. For the student conservative association this means that the wrong method has been chosen. . . . Whereas the 20,000 lobbying students of last week were more concerned with the financing of clubs and societies than the threat to independent political actions of students. . . .

"What is first of all necessary is a *political* campaign which explains that the proposals are not mainly about finance but are in essence an attempt to smash the political

organisation of students in support of the class struggle."

At a time when many student union funds were frozen, paralysing the operation of student-union clubs and societies, the slogan IMG comrades raised was not "Who Controls the Students' Union—Students or the State" but "Control for What." This approach completely ignored the extent and character of the Tory attack that in a very real way affected the majority of students. It was like arguing for a "red" trade union when the actual struggle at that point was for the right to organise an independent union.

The political line advanced by the IMG was a sectarian approach to an unfolding mass struggle. Like the Communist Party leadership, we had no realistic perspective for carrying the struggle on union autonomy forward. This ultraleft line on the question did not allow us to take the leadership of this struggle and in practice it allowed the initiative amongst students to remain with the CP.

The union autonomy campaign was immediately followed by the struggle against the present system of grants to students. This campaign opened up the possibility for the second time in two years (!) of developing a viable left-wing alternative leadership within the CP-controlled National Union of Students (NUS). But the IMG's line again cut across such a perspective. The political basis for our student work was that students have no common interests worth fighting for!

The Grants Campaign, however, is centered precisely around a specific student interest—a better system of grants for students! This explains the depth and breadth of support for the grants campaign. Many students are currently facing serious hardships due to inflation and cutbacks in education spending.

Following on from the successes of the union autonomy campaign, the grants campaign took on a mass character and became a major impetus to the student radicalisation in Britain. Since the November 1972 NUS conference, students have organised a national rent strike (involving the withholding of rent from college housing), boycotts of college cafeterias and major national demonstrations. Demonstrations throughout the country on 21 February 1973 mobilised about 60,000 students, and in March the first national student strike in Britain took place. In addition to these national activities, students have organised many special actions at a local level, including occupations, to further their claim for a decent grant.

A realistic perspective for carrying this grants campaign forward would have involved providing an action programme to unite students in struggle. The political line adopted by the IMG majority, however, excluded just this possibility. Instead, the tendency was to counterpose a nonexistent "more revolutionary" struggle to the existing one. This approach had a special appeal for some students who were already convinced of the need for a socialist revolution, but it did not resolve the pressing need to provide leadership for the majority of students who were still under the influence of the existing CP-led National Union of Students.

As with the student union autonomy campaign, the real way forward was to adopt a perspective of independent student mass action—which would have been capable of winning broad support in the working class and organised labour movement. Insofar as the CP's handling of the grants campaign cut across this principle—as it did at every turn—we should have led a fight against the CP, basing ourselves firmly on the pressing need for students to rely on their own united strength. By intervening in the actual struggles of students, by giving correct expression to their demands, and by showing them how to struggle, we could have effectively started to challenge the misleadership of the CP.

Despite the lessons of the past two years, the IMG majority leadership continues to adapt to the workerist tendencies and depreciates the importance of mass independent student action. This explains why, despite the national impact and great opportunities opened up by the student union autonomy campaign and grants campaign, we have been unable to make any significant breakthrough in the student movement. Instead of actually leading students into struggle, the role of Trotskyists has been reduced to one of abstract propagandising from the sidelines of the student movement. The balance sheet of our youth work shows this adaptationism has meant the loss of valuable opportunities. By defaulting in leadership, we have let the reformist leaders of the NUS off the hook and allowed the CP to retain its influence amongst students. Moreover, we have miseducated our own forces and those we have been able to influence.

All indications are that in the next immediate period there will be a continuation of militant student struggles. The only way we can be in the leadership of these struggles is by correcting our erroneous line on autonomous student struggles and develop an orientation directed to the concerns of the mass of student youth and not just the "vanguard." This should proceed from a correct appreciation of the youth radicalisation as analysed in the United Secretariat resolution on youth submitted to the last world congress. It will require a concrete appreciation and application of the transitional programme and method to the struggles of the youth.

IRELAND: new rise in the Irish struggle

One of the most important developments in Europe over the past three to four years has been the explosive new rise in the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination. The struggle of the Catholic masses for elementary democratic rights developed in the north of Ireland into a confrontation with the forces of British imperialism. Nurtured by the centuries-old struggle of the Irish for national freedom and unity, this new upsurge took on the most advanced forms of struggle seen in Europe for a long time—mass demonstrations and meetings, mass non-cooperation with the authorities, armed defence of the Catholic areas, and the creation of "no-go zones."

Attempts to smash the civil rights movement and the Republican vanguard have been unsuccessful despite the harassment, imprisonment, persecution and torture which the 20,000 British troops are committing against the Republican vanguard and large layers of the entire Catholic community.

In a situation where British imperialism and its occupation army were trying to crush the heroic struggles of the Irish in a most brutal manner and deny Irish people the right to self-determination, revolutionaries in Britain had

a special responsibility to do everything possible to support this struggle. The duties of British revolutionaries couldn't have been clearer—it was to build a mass movement powerful enough to force the withdrawal of British troops and to stop the British government from blocking the process of permanent revolution unfolding in Ireland. Such a movement had the potential to concretely aid the Irish struggle, and the possibilities to bring down the British government. To build a movement of this character a policy was needed which could reach out to broad layers of the British population and get the support of the mass of British workers.

A movement of such dimensions takes time to build. It requires patient, persistent propaganda, agitation and action. From the outset the kind of actions and demands raised needed to be capable of reaching, educating, and mobilising the working masses and the British troops. The political basis on which such a campaign should be built is the principle of self-determination for Ireland. The central demand is for the "immediate withdrawal of British troops." This demand expresses the right of the Irish to self-determination in a concrete slogan aimed against the British government and formulates the policy of revolutionary defeatism in an understandable and realisable manner for the British masses.

The objective conditions for British revolutionists to build such a movement have existed since 1970. In the July 1970 issue of *Red Mole* the article "What Is to Be Done" correctly stated that "there must be an all-out effort to build an effective solidarity movement on an all-inclusive basis, on the principle of self-determination for Ireland." That is, the axis for building an effective solidarity movement was correctly seen at that time to be "the principle of self-determination." The three demands put forward for the solidarity movement were "Self-Determination for Ireland," "Withdraw All British Troops Now," "Release Bernadette Devlin and All Irish Prisoners." (*Red Mole*, July 1970.) This course was soon to be rejected by the IMG majority leadership.

Mass-action perspective abandoned

The May 1971 IMG national conference rejected "Withdrawal of British Troops Now" as the central demand for the Irish solidarity campaign on the grounds that it might be supported by the wrong people for the wrong reasons. The editorial of the *Red Mole* of 15 November 1971 gave expression to this point of view of the IMG majority leadership:

"Many genuine revolutionaries believe that the demand for the 'immediate withdrawal of British troops' is adequate for this purpose (the building of a solidarity campaign) and indeed it is essential to include this demand in the platform of any campaign but this demand on its own is unfortunately ambiguous. It can very easily be taken up and transformed into a 'Bring the Boys Home' campaign based on liberal issues with only a negative impact. Such a campaign avoids the issues of the class struggle, can exist completely independent of them, and in its worse form can even divert resources from that struggle."

To make sure that no "liberals" would be able to actively aid the heroic struggle of the Irish peoples for self-determination by giving their support to a campaign which had "Withdrawal of British Troops" as its central axis, we changed our previously held ideas about the platform for the campaign. We made support for the "forces leading the armed struggle in Ireland" the central axis for a solidarity campaign. We had some difficulty in finding the exact formulation to express this and for a period the wording of the demand was changed at each national leadership meeting. These demands ranged from "Victory to the IRA," "Solidarity with the IRA," "Unconditional Support for the IRA in its Military Struggle Against British Imperialist and the Forces of Reaction in Ireland." The exact wording was dependent, not on how best to build a principled mass movement, but on how each shift in formulation would be accepted within the "vanguard." Under the influence of the Latin American resolution passed by the majority at the last world congress, the IMG majority had become infatuated with the question of armed struggle and wrongly thought support for the guerrillaist actions of the IRA to be the only principled basis for a solidarity campaign in Britain.

It is an elementary tactical error to demand of those forces who are prepared to work in a campaign "For the Immediate Withdrawal of British Troops," "For an End to Internment" and "For the Release of Political Prisoners" that they also immediately declare themselves "for" or "against" the "Victory of the IRA." To insist on this is an ultraleft and sectarian mistake of the first order. It serves to divide those people who have taken a principled position on the right to self-determination for the Irish people and cuts across the possibilities of mass mobilisations on a principled basis directed against the British government.

The IMG majority leadership made this error because they did not take as their starting point the needs of the Irish and British masses. They failed to understand that it was the responsibility of British revolutionists to begin to educate the British workers about British imperialism and to win their support for the demand of "Withdrawal of British Troops" as a step in the process of realising that they had no interests in British domination of Ireland.

A sectarian approach to an existing united front

We made the slogan "Victory to the IRA" the key demand of our front group, the Irish Solidarity Campaign (ISC). In making its starting point the "concerns of the vanguard" instead of the needs of the masses, this campaign could carry out nothing but small sectarian actions. When a broader united-front-type coalition was formed—the Anti-Internment League (AIL)—we still continued to maintain the ISC despite the fact that the AIL mobilised as many as 20,000 in October 1971. The reason was that the AIL was considered "liberal"—it only went as far as demanding the "Immediate Withdrawal of British Troops" and an "End to Internment." It did not declare for "Victory to the IRA." Therefore, the majority leadership of the IMG decided that the ISC still had to be maintained as a separate organisation.

Our perspective was to win the AIL to the slogan of "Victory to the IRA" or some similar demand. The *Red Mole* editorial 15 November 1971, in commenting on the

20,000-strong demonstration led by the AIL, explained:

". . . that it is necessary to transform the present campaign against internment and for the withdrawal of British troops into a campaign which was in active solidarity with those leading the fight against the armies of British imperialism."

In reality there was no principled reason for the existence of both the ISC and the AIL.

Because Trotskyists were not actively giving leadership to the AIL, making sure that it was firmly based on a mass-action perspective, the AIL began to lose its support in the face of a temporary downturn in the struggle and started to disintegrate. It was at this point that the majority leadership of the IMG started to make a turn toward the AIL—not from the point of view of rebuilding it and turning it outward but to "capture" it and "win" it to the "Victory" slogan. After doing just that, we found we had "captured" nobody but ourselves. Now, under our sectarian leadership, the AIL like the ISC has finally collapsed. And there the situation rests today.

Valuable time and potential have been wasted. The balance sheet of three years' work shows that we are no nearer to building a mass solidarity campaign in defence of the Irish revolution than we were three years ago. Despite the formation of our front group, the ISC, and the capturing of the AIL, British Trotskyists have done far less than we could to aid the struggle being waged by the oppressed Irish Catholics. The failure of the British section to do this is the most glaring and serious example of abdication of revolutionary responsibility resulting from the sectarian politics of the IMG over the past 3 to 4 years.

Political support for individual terrorism in Ireland

The misconception that it was a principle for the solidarity campaign to be based on support for those organisations participating in the "armed struggle" has led to other political errors which disoriented our comrades. Apart from the confusion which existed for some time as to which section of the IRA we should support, this wrong concept was responsible for the IMG giving full support to a small group that was expelled from the Republican movement, Saor Eire, an anti-Leninist terrorist grouping based in the Irish republic.

In publishing the manifesto of Saor Eire in the 1 June 1971 issue of the *Red Mole,* without politically differentiating ourselves from it (either in that issue or any other), the readers of the *Red Mole* could only draw one conclusion: that the Saor Eire group was basically correct politically—or at least moving in the right direction on many questions dealt with in their manifesto. The editors of the *Red Mole* published the manifesto ". . . in the belief that it is an important contribution to the discussion in the way forward for the Irish revolution." In outlining how it sees the Irish revolution taking place, Saor Eire stated its position very clearly in the manifesto:

"Some socialist groupings, for various subjective reasons hold to the belief that the mass of the people must be politically conscious and that the objective conditions must be ripe before we start to make this revolution. Such attitudes will condemn them to endless discussion, the continual analysis of actions after the event and eventually to political extinction."

In outlining their origins and attitudes toward politics, the Saor Eire manifesto explains:

"We were a small group of fighting men who had not carried out any revolutionary action which would have distinguished us from the numerous groups and organisations that were involved in unproductive discussions. Our first step was to expropriate arms. By this revolutionary action we were able to finance our group. Small groups of revolutionaries were organised with whatever weapons were available."

According to Saor Eire's manifesto, the Irish revolution has no need for a political programme. Politics are put way down on the list of priorities; first and foremost comes the question of arms. The revolution can be made without the masses being politically conscious, without the objective conditions being ripe. Guns take priority over politics.

The *Red Mole* gave its readers more insight into the nature of the Saor Eire group in its issue dated 1-15 January 1971. Two full pages were given to Saor Eire to explain their views in an interview with a *Red Mole* reporter. In answer to the question about the kind of movement Saor Eire was trying to build the reply was straight to the point: "Saor Eire is a left wing armed group which is attempting to act as a fuse or detonator to the Irish struggle . . . as opposed to past forms the Republican struggle took, Saor Eire is centred around the cities and could be called an urban guerrilla group. . . ."

Being an urban guerrilla group, Saor Eire had to work underground. As the Saor Eire spokesperson pointed out, "We are not participating directly as Saor Eire in any open political work." The spokesperson in the interview defines Saor Eire's existence and explains its relation to other political groups within Ireland. "We would not fall under the category of the party as Lenin understood it . . . we do not see ourselves in opposition to any of the present day groups; rather as an aid to help them build a party which can lead the working class to power." Saor Eire has now disintegrated and is no longer a factor in Irish politics.

In criticising the IMG majority leadership for politically supporting this openly avowed terrorist group it is necessary to remember that in doing so they were only following out the recommendation of the majority resolution of the 1969 world congress on Latin America. This was the tendency to play down Leninist politics and orient toward any group that took up the gun. Like the ERP in Argentina, the Saor Eire supported the guerrilla warfare line adopted by the majority at the last world congress. Both of these groups were in political opposition to the Fourth International on the need to build a Leninist combat party as a prerequisite for a successful revolution.

The non-response to the Derry massacre

On Sunday 30 January 1972, at the end of a civil-rights mass demonstration, the British army moved in and killed 13 unarmed demonstrators. In response to these cold-blooded killings the first general strike since 1913 was held throughout Ireland. There was a worldwide outcry against the Derry massacre and leading bourgeois

world papers were obliged to condemn the actions of the troops. Our response to the Derry massacre is another indication of how the emphasis given to the "armed struggle" has disoriented our movement and made it unable to understand the importance of mass actions, including peaceful mass demonstrations, in the process of politicising the masses around the question of imperialism. The response of the *Red Mole* in its February 7 issue was not to call for "No More Derrys," "Withdraw British Troops" but a call to "Avenge Derry" and "Open the Second Front." How *Red Mole* readers were expected to "Avenge Derry" or "Open the Second Front" was not explained. But the slogans *sounded* revolutionary to the *Red Mole* editors and that presumably was good enough.

In the same editorial the IMG's attitude toward mass demonstrations is spelled out:

"The demonstrations, unarmed and presenting an easy target, were the obvious choice to attempt and break the tightening noose of resistance. The army had failed completely to inflict a decisive blow against the IRA. The only way to defeat a rates and rents strike is by arresting thousands of householders. This was clearly impossible. The mass demonstrations provided the clearest target. Here lay the real hope of stemming the tide. Here one decisive blow could teach a terrible lesson to those who continued the resistance . . . the main lesson of the massacre in the Bogside is that the Irish people have to defend themselves guns in hand against British imperialism."

According to the logic of the *Red Mole,* unarmed demonstrations in Ireland, even large demonstrations, play into the hands of the British government. In fact, they present the British troops with easy target practice—they provide the "clearest target." And those who continue to participate in such demonstrations can be dealt a "terrible lesson" and a "decisive blow." Having failed to make any headway in building a solidarity movement in Britain, the IMG majority leadership arrogantly gave such advice to the leaders of the civil-rights demonstrations in Ireland.

The Irish civil-rights militants did not accept the advice given to them by the *Red Mole.* They did just the opposite. Within seven days they had organised an even bigger march and rally. Faced with this powerful display of solidarity and determination, the British troops were forced to stand on the sidelines looking on. This mass defiance of bourgeois law and order (like most demonstrations in Ireland, it was illegal) put the British troops on the defensive.

This action reinforced the lesson that revolutionaries have drawn over decades of working-class struggle—the best defence in face of repression is the mobilisation of the masses themselves. In this instance the Irish civil-rights leaders, by mobilising the masses in a large peaceful demonstration, reversed the tables and put the British government on the defensive. Instead of giving advice to the Irish people about the need for arms, it would have been politically more correct for the IMG to spell out that the main lesson of the Derry massacre was the urgent need to build comparable mass actions in Britain, powerful enough to force the British rulers to withdraw their occupation army.

That is not to say that British revolutionaries do not also have a responsibility to try to influence politically the leaders of the civil-rights movement. A major criticism that can be made of the IMG majority leadership is precisely that they failed to do this. Instead of trying to educate the leaders of the IRA to an understanding of the role of the revolutionary party and the necessity for mobilising the *masses* to defend themselves, in whatever way is necessary, the majority leadership of the IMG adapted to the backwardness of the Republican forces who were carrying out individual terrorist acts. Small guerrilla actions are no substitute for the actions of the masses themselves, even though such deeds might evoke the sympathy of the masses.

Our failure to attempt to politically educate the Republican vanguard is seen by our response to the bombings the IRA have carried out in Britain and Belfast. In response to the bombings by the Official IRA of the officers mess in Aldershot (England), in which several women cleaners were killed, the 28 February 1972 *Red Mole* wrote:

". . . No matter what criticism we might make of the tactics of the carrying out of this particular action the main fact is still that we unconditionally support the right of the IRA, or any other faction of the Republican population to carry on armed action aimed at destroying British rule in Ireland.

"The pacifists and liberals may weep and wring their hands with grief but even in their own moralising terms the just violence of the IRA is nothing compared to the centuries of British imperialist butchery in Ireland. In political terms we have explained, the struggle of the IRA is in the direct interests of the British working class. The fact that a bad technical error or tactical mistake meant that unfortunately British army officers were not killed by the blast, does not in the slightest alter the political content of the struggle of the IRA. It is in this light that we must look at the Aldershot incident.

"Victory to the IRA."

Red Mole, 10 July 1972, in an article written by Comrades Purdie and Lawless, states:

"The weakness of the Provisionals should not blind anyone to the importance of what they have been able to achieve. They have built up the most effective military resistance to British imperialism seen in Ireland since the Black and Tan war; never for more than fifty years has the British Army faced an adversary so formidable as the Provisional IRA.

"We refuse to criticise them for their military strategy; we do not accept that the bombing campaign was sectarian and we despise those on the British left who have echoed these slanders."

It is correct in principle to defend the right of oppressed peoples to use whatever means necessary to achieve their liberation. This does not mean, however, that in giving unconditional support to the fighters for Irish liberation we make political concessions to them. An essential part of our defence of the Irish liberation struggle is to make fraternal constructive criticism of political errors they commit and wrong methods of struggle they employ. For instance, while expressing our solidarity with the victims of the military junta in Chile, we constantly expose the bankruptcy of class collaborationism which paved the

way for the coup.

While defending the IRA against British imperialism we should, at the appropriate time, explain to the IRA that individual acts of terrorism carried out by their organisation are self-defeating and can only play into the hands of the British government. The Marxist movement has a wealth of experience to draw upon to show concretely that individual terrorist acts lead to the isolation of those who carry them out and make it more difficult to win support for their struggle. The IMG majority leadership has failed to promote this concept because it considers individual terrorism to be a minor tactical question of no political gravity.

How many more missed opportunities?

The way for British revolutionaries to give maximum aid to the Irish struggle, to help the IRA win a victory, and defeat our own bourgeoisie requires a strategy based on the needs of the Irish and British working masses and aimed at winning their support. To defeat our own bourgeoisie also requires a strategy that includes a policy toward the British troops, aimed at undermining the authority of the officer caste and winning as many of the British troops as possible to support the struggle for the right of the Irish people to self-determination. However, we have failed to carry out any effective propaganda or agitation amongst the British troops for this purpose. We have not done this in the name of the IMG nor did we try to convince the ISC or the AIL of the worth of this perspective. It is the main task of revolutionaries to mobilise in mass action all those in support of the struggle of the oppressed Catholics; complimentary to this task and an integral part of it is to develop a revolutionary-socialist policy directed toward the morale and outlook of British troops in Ireland.

The balance sheet of the British section's work in defence of the Irish revolution is one of missed opportunities and an abrogation of revolutionary responsibility. The reasons for this are rooted in our orientation to a thin layer of vanguard elements instead of basing ourselves on the needs of the Irish and British masses. Instead of politically educating this thin vanguard layer on how to reach out to the masses and strengthen themselves, the IMG majority leadership made ultraleft and sectarian adaptations. The armed struggle as such has been elevated above the application of Marxist politics. The line adopted by the majority leadership of the Fourth International at the last world congress induced the IMG to develop such erroneous proterrorist positions toward the defence of the Irish revolution.

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT: the deepening radicalisation

In the last few years both the Labour and Tory governments have tried to solve the crisis of British capitalism by stepping up their attacks on the living standards of the working class. Entry into the European Economic Community has meant an acceleration in the rationalisation of a number of British industries resulting in the least productive factories being closed down, an increase in the number of domestic and international mergers, and an intensification of speedups on the factory floor.

The ruling class knows that its policy can succeed only if the workers can be driven to increase productivity while real wages are lowered. Toward this end, ruling class policy has tried to create a permanent army of unemployed, cut into the living standards, social services and democratic rights won through decades of working class struggle. With one of the highest inflation rates in Europe the government is trying to impose a limit on wage increases that is unacceptable to the majority of the workers.

Through the Industrial Relations Act the Tories hope to put the unions in a legal straitjacket, thereby keeping wage increases low. This Act has been used by the Tories to jail militant trade union leaders, curb rank and file militancy, and prevent solidarity actions. The ruling class also seeks through the Industrial Relations Act to draw the union bureaucrats into further class collaboration. The Tories are proceeding with the full knowledge that a confrontation with labour is inevitable.

Faced with this Tory offensive, the workers have not remained passive nor have they lacked the confidence to organise and fight back. On the contrary they have launched massive defensive struggles often in a most militant manner. To prevent factories closing down and to save their jobs, workers have occupied factories and conducted "work-ins," demonstrating that the bosses are not necessary for industry to operate. Against the wishes of their own labour and trade-union leaders, the miners and building workers have developed new struggle tactics, including "flying pickets," to win their strikes. Mass demonstrations outside Pentonville jail last year forced the Tories to release five dockers imprisoned for their trade-union militancy. And manifesting their opposition to the Industrial Relations Act, tens of thousands of workers participated in two 24-hour general strikes. In February 1971, 140,000 workers turned out to a demonstration called by the TUC (Trade Union Congress) brass to protect the Tory's antilabour legislation.

The big increase in the number of strikes, protests, demonstrations, rallies, work-ins, and factory occupations since 1970 has not been confined exclusively to the *industrial* workers, or even to those workers who have had long years of experience in working-class struggle. More often than not it has been the young workers, many of whom are gaining their experience in the labour and trade-union movement for the first time, who have been in the forefront of these struggles. Increasing numbers of young women workers, influenced both by this rise in worker militancy and by the women's liberation movement, have also been involved. Immigrant workers, determined to eliminate once and for all the racism which they encounter both inside and outside the labour movement, are joining together in strikes and other forms of militant struggle to fight their oppression and exploitation as Blacks and as workers.

The deep radicalisation which is taking place in Britain has started to "proletarianise" the white-collar and traditionally more conservative unions like the draughtsmen, civil servants, hospital workers and teachers. In fact, some of these workers (like the teachers), formerly conservative and backward, are now amongst the most radical. This is in part due to the entry of many of the radicalised students of the mid and late sixties into education where they have continued to advocate and

fight for their radical ideas.

Without a doubt the radicalisation that is starting to take place within the British labour movement, and is only just beginning, has opened up big possibilities for Trotskyists to recruit young workers. It was our responsibility to analyse this new situation and project concrete ways in which our relatively small organisation could move forward and take advantage of these favourable openings. Unfortunately the policies of the majority leadership in Britain were an obstacle to this.

Our 'turn' to the workers

The turn made by the IMG toward the working class, which was begun in 1970, was not based on an objectively correct analysis of the depth and scope of the radicalisation taking place in the factories and trade unions, or an assessment of the concrete political openings which this radicalisation afforded our small forces. The "turn" came about primarily as a result of the majority leadership bending before the workerist pressures that the radicalising youth were exerting on our movement. Thus this change in orientation was artificial and schematic.

As previous sections of this document explain, the thinking of the "vanguard," particularly the student "vanguard," was that revolutionaries should pay less attention to questions like Vietnam, the struggles of students, or to the Black and women's liberation movements. They believed that all these questions were peripheral to the "real" class struggle that was occurring in the factories and on the shop floor. Because our "turn" to the working class was in reality an adaptation to these pressures on our movement, it meant that we turned away from anti-imperialist struggles, the struggles of women, Blacks and students. It meant that the IMG majority leadership, in adopting this too narrow concept of the class struggle, which was so prevalent within the "vanguard," failed to respond to major struggles taking place outside the factories and workshops.

One example was the way the majority leadership were willing to champion only those struggles of women that occurred in industry. Socialist Woman Groups, which the IMG set up for this purpose, concentrated for a year or more in organising the women night cleaners. They organised pickets, wrote and distributed leaflets, collected union dues and organised community support. In reality, we tried to substitute ourselves for the normal machinery of a trade union without having the authority or weight of a trade union. In the end this work fizzled out and the women cleaners were left to fend for themselves again.

Before this, the 1971 national conference of the IMG decided to build an industrial campaign on the issue of equal pay/low pay. After 18 months it became clear that it was impossible to develop this campaign since it required roots in the trade-union movement that we did not yet have. This, too, was abandoned. Soon after this, the sectarian Socialist Woman Groups, which were only on the periphery of the women's liberation movement, folded up too. The lessons of these experiences, like many others, have yet to be drawn by the majority leadership.

In Britain the women's liberation movement began to emerge toward the end of 1969. At that time we were in a very good position as we had experienced women cadres who were able to give leadership to this movement. We could have projected and fought for a fighting women's movement with a perspective of a mass campaign around key demands that were being raised by this movement and which had the potential of taking the movement forward (free contraception and abortion on demand, 24-hour nurseries, etc.). However, the adaptation to the workerism prevalent within the vanguard cut across this possibility. Today we are largely outside of the women's liberation movement. Four years later, we still have no adequate political line on the question of women's oppression and how to fight it. This has meant missed opportunities to make gains.

Only a 'few years' left

The way in which we tried to intervene in the workers struggles was far out of proportion to what we could realistically accomplish given our relatively small forces. This was clear to anyone who attended our meetings during this period. These meetings were generally attended not so much by workers but by youth, particularly students. Despite the new wave of workers militancy, the meetings that attracted the most people were those that related to anti-imperialist issues, students and women.

The majority leadership justified the "turn" on the basis that there was not much time left before a decisive showdown and unless we got an "implantation" in the working class we would be unprepared to counter the coming right-wing development in Britain. The "Perspectives Document" submitted to the 1970 national conference, "From a Propaganda Group to a League for Revolutionary Action," informs us:

"We have at most a few years to help create a conscious leadership largely from our own efforts. The alternative is clearly a decisive defeat for the working class and a period of reaction.

". . . we are, in a sense, in a vicious circle just now; our ability to intervene in the many struggles and even explosions which are inevitable in the coming years is strictly limited by our small size; and yet unless we can intervene in this kind of struggle we will find it difficult to grow in size and influence.

"Our essential task is to use the few years breathing space that we have—which will give us many opportunities—to make a qualitative leap from a propaganda group to a league for revolutionary action—this is the only way to break the vicious circle."

Tailending the "vanguard," the majority leadership had become convinced that not a leftward but a rightward development was in the offing. By the time of the 1971 national conference, the burden on our small movement became almost unbearable. The Perspectives Document, called, "No, We Haven't All the Time in the World," informed us that:

"Over the next period the class struggle will be at a returning point in Britain—all feelings of complacency must be swept aside. Either the working class makes big advances in that period or a right wing development will take place. . . .

"If we fail the price will be a high one. . . .

"There is no easy answer. Everything we do—especially the big steps we take—will be full of dangers. But it is much better to try and fail than to remain safe but impotent. We say categorically that the day of the small

group is over—we grow large or we degenerate into a sect. The choice is ours. . . .

"Let anyone unwilling to face this gigantic task leave now. . . .

". . . let us never forget—*we haven't all the time in the world.*"

If we were to brave the impending catastrophe, it was argued, it was no longer possible to build the party in the old plodding way. We were trapped in a vicious circle and the only way out was to gain an implantation in the working class by a forced march. Once this "turn" was put into effect, it was argued that the party would grow at a much faster rate.

What was involved was more than recognition of the new possibilities to reach militant young workers. The new orientation was really beginning to warp our judgment of what was happening in the class struggle and what our response should be, given our relatively small forces.

Because it was based on the concerns of the vanguard and not on an objective assessment of the class struggle, the new orientation soon began to distort our understanding of the major working-class struggles that did occur. This could be detected in 1970 when, under the influence of the subjectivity of the "vanguard," it became clear that we were revising the fundamental concepts of Lenin on the nature of the Labour Party.

The Labour Party—a fundamental question

Until 1970 our position had been one of critical support to this reformist mass party based on the trade unions. A change was projected just prior to the last election held in June 1970, when the 15 April issue of the *Red Mole* carried a major article by editorial board member Robin Blackburn. (He was not a member of the IMG at the time.)

In his article, which was entitled "Let It Bleed," Blackburn argued that the Labour Party is a "capitalist party" not essentially different from the Tory party or the Democratic Party in the United States. He argued that the Labour Party's hold over the British working class had now become so weakened that revolutionaries could not justify a vote for it against the Tories in the election. He went on to explain that the best way revolutionaries should conduct the fight against both was to ". . . pull none of our punches. We should disrupt the campaigns of the bourgeois parties and their leading spokesmen using all the imaginative and direct methods which the last few years have taught us."

The national secretary of the IMG at that time, Comrade Pat Jordan, wrote a "critique" of this article. Unfortunately, it was so weak and ambiguous that most readers of the *Red Mole* could come to no other conclusion than that Blackburn's positions, which were at least clear, were those of the IMG. In the same issue of the *Red Mole* that carried Comrade Jordan's "critique" a much clearer and more precise lead was given as to what militants should actually do on election day. This was pictured in the punch line of a cartoon strip which showed red moles beating up a Labour and a Tory election speaker, trampling then underfoot and tearing up the "Vote Labour" placard and then joining a long line of moles triumphantly carrying the red flag. This was the real position of our movement, stripped of all camouflage and demagogy.

The Oxford comrades of the IMG had no difficulty in taking the "new" line seriously and implementing it. When Labour Party bureaucrat Michael Stewart tried to speak at a public meeting in Oxford, our comrades there were instrumental in breaking it up. The Political Committee endorsed the actions of the Oxford branch showing they, too, agreed with the main thrust of Blackburn's article. Busting up Stewart's meeting was rationalised by claiming that this was the way to fight the Labour bureaucracy. But just the opposite occurred—we played right into their hands. Not surprisingly, the Labour leadership and the bourgeois press were not slow to give the maximum publicity to this incident in which they hypocritically portrayed the Trotskyists as being opponents of free speech, both in and out of the labour movement, while they were its champions.

To make 100 percent sure that no one thought we favoured a vote for the Labour Party as against the Tories, an IMG leaflet characterised the election as a "carnival." Thinking it necessary to "give a lead" in the "carnival," the leaflet urged workers to "throw aside illusions in labourism." The best way workers could do this under the circumstances, it was claimed, was if they ". . . confronted the task of constructing a new working class party which expresses the revolutionary essence of that class." The leaflet ended with the stirring message in bold print: "The Real Struggle is After the Election and Build the Revolutionary Vanguard." This sectarian and ultraleft policy was almost identical to the Maoist line. Their election stickers read, "Don't Vote—Revolution."

Instead of this sterile approach, we could have found ways of taking advantage of the election campaign to explain our ideas on the Labour Party; why it should be supported against the Tories, and why it was necessary to fight for an alternative leadership and programme. We could have utilised the increased interest in politics during the election period to explain our fundamental thinking on the burning issues of the day—like Ireland, NATO, antilabour legislation, inflation, women's liberation. We could have utilised the election to educate our own forces and others about the superiority of our programme and what has to be done to realise it. We did none of these things. Instead we were content to remain on the sidelines making abstract propaganda about a "new working-class party." Not surprisingly, our call for the workers to form a new working-class party got no more response than our call to break up Labour Party election rallies.

It should also be pointed out that, on top of calling for abstention in the last election, the majority leadership of the IMG opposed the idea that Trotskyists could run their own candidates under their own name and on a revolutionary-socialist programme. The majority leadership think that bourgeois elections are not very important. They act as though it would be reformist for revolutionaries to participate in them and that it would only help to spread parliamentary illusions within the working class.

This whole sectarian approach results in missed opportunities to build the IMG. We miss out on making new contacts and recruits and getting our programme and organisational principles known to wider layers of militants who have yet to hear about us. As Lenin correctly explained—such a policy is "infantile."

Giving up our previously held position on the Labour Party presented a certain dilemma for the majority leadership. If we are against the election of a Labour government, then what type of government do we favour? The majority leadership answered this with the formula "For a Workers Government Based on Democratic Trade Unions."

How was this abstract slogan to help us in the concrete circumstances? The slogan obviously had nothing to do with the realities of the class struggle *today*, since the only alternative government to the Tories which the workers are prepared to identify with and support right now is a Labour government. While the British working class have illusions in many things, thinking that their unions — which belong to the Labour Party — can form a government by themselves is not one of them. They have recognised for decades now that their unions are basically instruments for defending and advancing their rights on the job. The workers have also understood that they needed a political party to form a government that would fight for and protect their political interests (whether Labour governments have done this in the past or will do so in the future is a different question). It is because the workers understand the limitations of the trade unions that they initiated and built the British Labour Party.

For about one year the majority leadership put forward the slogan "For a Workers Government Based on Democratic Trade Unions" despite the fact that it did not make sense to most people. Without any evaluation, we quietly dropped this slogan at a special national conference held in December 1972 and went on record in favour of calling for a Labour government. The "Document on Government" presented by the Political Committee to this special conference stated:

"Nevertheless in the event of an election this conference i) Where no revolutionary candidate is standing [which "revolutionary" candidates?—AH], calls for a vote for Labour as the majority party of the working class and because the victory of this party will strengthen the confidence and combativity of the working class. ii) Calls for the formation of a government by whatever party of the working class has a majority at the time a government can be formed. At this moment in time this means concretely a labour government."

These formulations are dangerous. Trotskyists have never supported the Labour Party on the grounds that it is the party with the majority of working-class support. If this was our criterion, we would have no option but to support the capitalist Democratic Party in the United States. After all, do not a lot of workers and certainly most of the trade-union bureaucrats give their support to this openly capitalist party?

This reasoning behind our return to a pro-Labour position is wrong. If not corrected it will take our movement to the right. Our stand in favour of a Labour victory in the next election must proceed from a clear class characterisation of the Labour Party. The correct position is that the Labour Party, while having a reformist, bourgeois programme and treacherous leadership, is not a capitalist party like the Tories but is organised and financed by the workers and based on the mass organizations of the working class. In today's conditions, in the absence of a revolutionary alternative, we call for the election of a Labour government to replace the Tories.

The radicalisation that has taken place in Britain up to this point has by and large bypassed the Labour Party, although there are many indications that this is changing. The radicalised youth attracted to Trotskyism show a healthy contempt for the Social Democracy and Stalinism. They have a generally correct understanding of the treacherous role played by the reformist bureaucracies of both camps. At the same time many of these radicalised youth do not see the contradictory nature of the Labour Party as explained by Lenin in "'Left' Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder." Their most common error is to see the Labour Party in a one-sided way; to equate the rank and file with its bureaucratic leadership, and to overlook its dual and contradictory character. It is our job to educate the radicalising youth in a correct understanding of these fundamental questions of a class character.

The confusion by the majority leadership about the nature of the Labour Party and what our strategy and tactics should be toward it has made it impossible for us to respond in a correct manner to the big working-class struggles when they have broken out. It has meant that we have tried to impose our own level of consciousness upon that of the masses, misjudged the actual tempo of the class struggle, and substituted abstract schemas in place of a programme of class action to fight the Tory offensive. Our wrong orientation toward the Labour Party has miseducated and disoriented our comrades (and other forces we influence). This has made it impossible for our movement to make the maximum gains out of the deepening class struggle.

The crisis at the Upper Clyde Shipyards

Let us get down to concrete cases. It was inevitable that our orientation toward the "vanguard," which is at this time generally ultraleft, would seriously affect the judgment and reactions of the majority leadership in the specific workers struggles that developed.

The first decisive test came in July 1971 when the Tories tried to eliminate 8,000 jobs at the Upper Clyde Shipyards (UCS) in Scotland. Workers responded to this threat to their livelihoods by organising a "work-in." The long and bitter struggle which ensued marked a turning point in the British class struggle.

Due to the treachery of the trade union and Labour Party bureaucracies, a number of big strikes (such as the post office workers) had previously ended in setbacks and the newly elected Tory government had managed to get its antilabour legislation on the statute books. The action by UCS workers had the potential to reverse this trend. These workers made it clear that they were prepared to put a stop to the closure of factories and the elimination of jobs. This new form of militant actions was an inspiration and showed the way forward to the whole working class movement. This high point in working-class struggles presented a special opportunity for revolutionary socialists. It tested the theory and practice of every left-wing group in the country.

Because we had few comrades active in the trade unions, and nobody actually working in the yards, our response had to be primarily one of propaganda. Within these limitations a certain amount of agitational work could have been conducted, especially in those unions where

we had some influence. Within Trades Councils, trade-union branches, shop-stewards committees and the like, resolutions could have been presented and a broad support campaign initiated.

A prerequisite for any effective work we could have done around the UCS events was to keep ourselves firmly rooted in the struggle there. The IMG majority leadership failed to do this. Our line during these events showed how remote our leadership was from the reality of the UCS struggle. In response to the sit-in, the front-page headlines in the 15 July *Red Mole* read: "The Occupation of the Clydeside: First Step to a Scottish Workers Republic?" The August 1971 *Red Mole* Special Clydeside Supplement stated:

"If the workers are to keep the yards open and avoid this catastrophic defeat, then they *must* keep control. The dangers of being disarmed and sold out by the existing leaderships is very great (their performance up to the present time is discussed below). The dangers of Tory nationalisation when the working class has already advanced to a situation of de facto workers' control (and the technical demands of occupation would quickly lead to the creation of elementary organs of dual power), across key industries throughout a region, are even greater.

"If the working class are not defeated by surrendering their control for 'nationalisation' or by the union bureaucrats through defensive demands, then clearly the Tories will be forced to send in the Army, firstly to intimidate the workers, then to clear the yards by force.

"Thus the implication of the present situation is that only by pursuing the question of *power* in Scotland can the Scottish working class avoid catastrophic defeat. It is make or break. At the same time, this battle over the future of the lynchpin in the economy of Scotland raises the national question. The British bourgeoisie have no future for Scotland. At the same time they can't tolerate the loss of it. Its future must lie in the hands of the working class.

"It is clear that preparations for the occupation cannot be purely technical. They demand education. They will involve the creation of an embryonic workers' militia, a high degree of political leadership which understands the revolutionary logic of the situation."

The *Red Mole* obviously did not realise that the only section of the UCS yards that was partially controlled by the workers was the gates. Production was maintained in more or less the same manner as before. The only difference was that the Shop Stewards Committees had some discussion with the management about the running of the yards. The vast majority of the UCS workers had no say in the decision-making. The Shop Stewards Committees and the Co-ordinating Committee was led by the Stalinists, and democracy within these committees had been curtailed.

With this somewhat more balanced picture the ideas raised in the *Red Mole* about the situation having "already advanced to a situation of de facto workers control," of "pursuing the question of *power* in Scotland," and "the creation of an embryonic workers militia" were nothing more than empty "left" rhetoric. They amounted to a substitute for a real analysis and demands around which we could make a meaningful intervention.

The biggest political obstacle to the UCS workers were the Stalinists who completely dominated the yards. The Stalinists took the view that the shipyards could become "viable and profitable" and, therefore, held back the workers from recognition of the need to bring the entire weight of the labour movement behind the UCS workers.

Instead the IMG majority leadership were demanding that the "work-in" be transformed to a "sit-in." This preoccupation with offering tactical advice detracted from the real need to combat the pernicious role of the Stalinists at UCS who refused to give the workers any real perspective for struggle.

In point of fact, the slogan to "transform" the "work-in" to a "sit-in" was not even linked to the living dynamic of the struggle at the UCS. Because of their lack of information and the erroneous impression given by the Stalinists that the yards could be made "profitable," the workers saw no point in a strike or "sit-in" since they were demanding the right to a job. This was the reality of the UCS struggle, which was rejected by the IMG majority leadership on the basis that the right to employment is a bourgeois concept.

It was necessary to recognise the actual level of consciousness of the UCS workers and understand that in the first place our task was a political one—of popularising and supporting the "work-in" and of helping the workers to understand the bankrupt policies of their Stalinist leaders. The slogan to transform the work-in into a sit-in totally isolated us from the UCS workers.

Workers' control

Preoccupied by this tactical question, the IMG majority leadership missed the opportunity of advancing ideas around "workers control" that were much more attuned to the struggle. The workers at UCS wanted to continue working and should have been supported in that stand whole-heartedly. For one thing it was the first step toward the workers actually controlling the work situation themselves. A strike or "sit-in" in this situation would have defeated this objective. Demands for workers control were very appropriate and would have cut across the influence of the Stalinists (who greatly feared just this possibility) and helped to advance the struggle to a higher level.

However, it is not surprising that the IMG majority leadership did not take advantage of the opportunity to present some of our fundamental ideas on workers' control. The reason why becomes clear when we read from a centre spread in the *Red Mole* of 13 March 1972 how one of the central slogans of our movement (even incorporated in *The Transitional Program*) has no longer any validity:

"We are therefore completely opposed to workers taking over and running their factories or industries within capitalism. What occurs when this is tried, for example at UCS, is the demoralisation of the workers and the discrediting of the whole idea of workers control. It is not the job of socialists to tell the working class that the organisation of its own conditions of production under capitalism is the solution to its problems,on the contrary it is necessary to point out that this is not in the slightest a solution to its problems. Far from socialists being in favour of workers taking over and running their own factories, they are totally opposed to workers taking *any* responsibility for the running of firms under capitalism. Socialists must

explain that it is *not* the management itself which oppresses the workers, but the entire production relations of capitalism. Any propaganda for workers control must therefore have this as its key point. NO WORKERS RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE RUNNING FIRMS UNDER CAPITALISM must be the absolutely central slogan of any campaign for workers control."

What was necessary at UCS, because of the unique form of struggle, was to mark out and develop a path in the direction of workers control of production, which would of itself be a preliminary stepping stone to workers management of the whole economy. Trotsky was not of the opinion, and correctly so, that workers should hold back from operating their own factories under capitalism. As Trotsky pointed out:

"What state regime corresponds to workers' control of production? It is obvious that the power is not yet in the hands of the proletariat, otherwise we would have not workers' control of production but the control of production by the workers' state as an introduction to a regime of state production on the foundations of nationalisation. What we are talking about is workers' control under the capitalist regime, under the power of the bourgeoisie. . . .

"The epigones have purely mechanically adopted the notion that workers' control of production, like soviets, can only be realised under revolutionary conditions. If the Stalinists tried to arrange their prejudices in a definite system, they would probably argue as follows: workers' control as a sort of economic dual power is inconceivable without the opposition of soviets to the bourgeois power; consequently—the Stalinists would be inclined to conclude—to advance the slogan of workers' control of production is admissible only *simultaneously* with the slogan of soviets.

"From all that has been said above, it is quite clear how false, schematic, and lifeless is such a construction. In practice, this is transformed into the unique ultimatum which the party puts to the workers: I, the party, will allow you to fight for workers' control only in the event that you agree simultaneously to build soviets. But this is precisely what is involved—that these two processes need not necessarily run in parallel and simultaneously. Under the influence of crisis, unemployment, and the predatory manipulations of the capitalists, the working class in its majority may turn out to be ready to fight for the abolition of business secrecy and for control over banks, commerce, and production before it has come to understand the necessity of the revolutionary conquest for poser." (*The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany,* Pathfinder Press, pp. 78, 81.)

The fight for workers' control is an important part of the transitional programme and becomes posed especially acutely during times of big class upsurge, regardless of its duration.

Our response to the UCS crisis showed that we had little understanding of how to relate in a meaningful way to a livingstruggle. We had preconceived notions as to how the class struggle *should* unfold but the UCS workers did not conform to them.

These preconceived ideas were not rooted in any analysis of the real struggle taking place at UCS, but came from the stereotyped concepts of the class struggle that are prevalent amongst radicalising student youth. Our understanding and response to the UCS crisis was, therefore, "lifeless, abstract, and schematic." Through adapting to these layers, the majority leadership rejected the starting point of the transitional programme and method —that it is necessary to base ourselves on the real struggles and needs of the working class.

The sort of ideas we could have emphasized and won support for were "Open the Books," "Nationalisation under Workers Control," "For a Sliding Scale of Hours and Wages," "Full Support from the Labour Party and TUC," "Broaden the Shop Stewards Committees," "For the Democratic Election of all Workers Representatives."

The struggle for democratic rights

One of the consequences of focusing on the "concerns" of the "vanguard" and not those of the masses is that it is often difficult to determine the precise stage of the struggle, whether it is at the beginning or end. This point is brought home quite sharply in relation to the IMG majority's views on the question of defending democratic rights won by workers over long years of struggle. The general approach of the majority leadership has not been to see the importance of these issues, but to downplay them. They consider that the workers have long passed by the stage of struggling to defend and extend their democratic rights. This line of thinking completely militates against the real role that Trotskyists can and should be playing. Moreover, it is totally misleading on how to win the leadership of the working class.

If we are serious about "gaining an implantation" in the working class, we have to understand that a real "implantation" involves our comrades winning recognition as revolutionary working-class leaders. Our main aim, therefore, ought to be to give expression to the needs that workers actually feel and to provide a perspective for struggle. It is only in this way that we will win their allegiance.

In this process the defence and extension of democratic rights are especially important. The policy of the Tory government (and of the Labour government before it) is to cut into these rights which the workers have struggled for and won. As the crisis of capitalism deepens and the Tories step up their offensive, the workers feel this attack more and more. They are also prepared to fight to retain and advance their rights.

Revolutionaries are duty bound to be in the forefront of these struggles. We are the only force which has a rounded policy for the defence of democratic rights. Such a perspective involves the workers relying on their own strength, utilising extra-parliamentary methods of struggles, and applying whatever tactics are efficacious in the given situation. The Stalinists and the Social Democrats reject this approach, relying on lobbying parliament and MP's.

In the past few years there has been no shortage of opportunities to test this method in the heat of the class struggle. Three instances stand out: the struggle against the Industrial Relations Act; the defence of five imprisoned dockers in July 1972; and the defence of the 24 building workers who are being victimised and put up on legal charges because of militant picketing in last year's building strike. These three major assaults by the government against workers' rights provided opportunities for revolutionary socialists to test out their line. It was quite possible for

even a small revolutionary group like ours to have an important impact on these struggles and thereby to make recruits.

The Tories have proceeded to implement anti-labour legislation similar to that drawn up by the previous Labour government. When the Labour government was in power it was compelled to retreat when the unions started to organise and fight back. The Tories, however, are determined to drive ahead despite big working-class opposition. In response to this challenge, it was necessary to unite the whole of the working class behind the fight against the Industrial Relations Bill. What was needed was a programme of class action that showed the way forward for the working class in their fight against both the Tories and the Labour bureaucrats who obstructed a militant united response.

The impact that this attack had on the working class is clear from the following quote from the *Red Mole* of 8-22 March 1971:

"December 8th: 350,000-500,000 workers strike, against the advice of the TUC; January 1st: 10,000 workers strike in Birmingham; January 12th: one million workers are involved in the TUC's 'lunchtime' protest; about one third of them also use the day to stop work completely. February 21st: 140,000 or more workers go on the TUC demonstration in London; probably 1-2 million are there in spirit; this is bigger than any demonstration including the October 1968 demonstration on Vietnam; March 1st: at least 1 1/2 million A. U. E. W. workers strike."

The *Red Mole* was not very inspired by these big working-class demonstrations. The same article complains that the most popular slogan on the marches and rallies was "Kill the Bill"—a slogan which expressed clearly the desires and aims of those participating. The *Red Mole* just could not understand it. ". . . nobody has explained clearly what *Kill the Bill* might realistically imply!" Perhaps the slogan was too complex for the *Red Mole* to comprehend.

Even the most revolutionary slogan would not have made much difference, however, because the demonstrations "have not had effect on the Tories, or will not have any effect. . . ." And why were the Tories unaffected by these militant demonstrations which apart from the February 21 one took place in the "bosses time"? ". . . the Tories know that the workers will be back the next day," replied the *Red Mole*. So what *would* have made the Tories sit up and take notice? If the workers had *never* returned to work? Correct! According to *Red Mole*, "The only attack which can have any effect is an unpredictable attack. This means that an indefinite general strike is the only answer."

In response to the Tory offensive and the big working-class reply to it, all the *Red Mole* had to say was that any action short of an "indefinite general strike" was inadequate. Not seeing one in sight, the *Red Mole* made it clear that the perspective for continuing the struggle was not very good. "It is clear that the Tories, no matter what action is taken, will not withdraw the Bill from Parliament." The *Red Mole* went on to say that the main task was to organise "councils of action." The fact that councils of action did not flow out of this struggle against the Industrial Relations Bill made no difference to the *Red Mole*.

The same type of error was repeated during the campaign to free the five imprisoned dockers. The dockers were put in Pentonville prison because of their militant picketing activity against threats to their jobs. The campaign built around defending the five dockers mobilised thousands of workers who saw this action as a threat to the whole trade-union movement. As a result, the Tories were forced to back down before this militant show of strength and to release the five dockers.

The response of the *Red Mole* "Strike Special" dated 25 July 1972, while making a good start, drifted into a world only a select few could understand:

"The most immediate task of the moment is to FREE THE FIVE! This is a task for mass action by the working class which must be combined with preparations to RESIST FURTHER ARREST!

"Already the strike movement has spread far beyond the docks, extending hour by hour to wider sections of workers. We must GENERALISE THE STRIKE, till it embraces the whole working class.

"The movement launched by the dockers is not a passive withdrawal of labour for a wage claim, but a political struggle against the I. R. Act and the Government. Therefore, the old industrial tradition of leaving the factory and going home must be replaced by the new tactic of MASS OCCUPATIONS OF FACTORIES AS BASES FOR EXTENDING THE STRUGGLE.

"From such bases the miners' tactic of MASS PICKETING OF OTHER FACTORIES STILL WORKING must be organised, as well as all the other necessary activities for spreading the movement.

"From the start this struggle is being led against the opposition or passivity of the official trade union leaderships, and while the fight must go on to win every union to the movement, the leadership must remain in the hands of the rank and file organisations if the offensive is to be carried to a successful conclusion. Therefore MASS MEETINGS MUST BE CALLED TO ELECT STRIKE COMMITTEES to lead every group of striking workers. . . .

"Bodies like trades councils, because they are based purely on delegates from trade union branches, are too narrow for the task of uniting the representatives of the great mass of workers in factories and housing estates. Therefore, as in 1926, COUNCILS OF ACTION MUST BE FORMED to draw together all the forces of the working class in every locality. As the local leadership of the strike the councils of action must include delegates of strike committees, Tenant Associations and all other rank and file organisations of the working class in the locality.

"The state will not stand idle in the face of a massive working class challenge to capitalist authority and, as in the miners strike and all other great class battles, violence will be attempted against strikers, pickets and militants. As in 1926, to deter and resist such violence, WORKERS' DEFENCE GROUPS MUST BE FORMED BY STRIKE COMMITTEES AND COUNCILS OF ACTION. Not one more worker must fall into the hands of the police, the courts and the jails of the capitalist state.

"While the decisive force in the struggle will be that of the organised working class, we must immediately create SUPPORT COMMITTEES embracing all those ready to work in support of the movement."

The *Red Mole* sweepingly suggested that the following organisations join together in order to put these demands

into action: IMG, IS, SLL, Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), the Militant Group, The Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), "and other organisations of the revolutionary left." *Noticeably absent from this list are the biggest organisations having working-class support—the Labour Party and the Communist Party!* This is appealing to the new mass "vanguard" with a vengeance.

A more recent example of this unrealistic approach to working-class struggles, especially the need to defend democratic rights, is the case of the "Shrewsbury 24." The Shrewsbury building workers are in an extremely tough situation. They face a trial that could last up to five months and possible heavy fines and imprisonment or both. They are on charges arising out of their militant trade-union activity during last year's building workers' strike.

The IMG have made this a priority campaign. Some members have done a great deal of hard work on this. However, the fundamental attitude of the majority leadership is as wrong as it is on all other matters relating to the defence of workers democratic rights.

The 25 May 1973 issue of the *Red Weekly* (formerly the *Red Mole*) carries a major article in its centre spread authored by Ed Wyatt that explains to readers the attitude revolutionaries should take toward the question of democratic rights:

"We have to base ourselves on the situation as it is, not as we would like it to be. The right to picket will never be defended by appealing to standards of democracy or legality for which the ruling class no longer has any use. We must learn the lesson of the past that the only way the right to picket can be defended is by depriving the class enemy of its monopoly over the means of intimidation and its monopoly of armed force. Wherever the relationship of forces permits, militants must now begin to take up whatever physical means are necessary to defeat the enemy on the picket lines. It is in these clashes with the bourgeois state that the working class will be steeled to carry out an indispensable task if socialism is ever to be established: the crushing of the capitalist judiciary, its police and the armed forces once and for all."

Ed Wyatt makes a classical ultraleft mistake when he advises readers of the *Red Weekly* that the right to picket, for example, cannot be defended by an appeal to democratic and legal rights which the working-class movement has fought for and won over many years of struggle. Often it can. And revolutionaries must be in the forefront of all struggles on the question of defending and advancing workers' democratic rights.

As for the point Ed Wyatt makes about "militants must now begin to take up whatever physical means are necessary to defeat the enemy on the picket lines," this is nothing new to the working-class movement. The only possible reason for its inclusion must be to identify with the "minority violence" line that is prevalent amongst certain sections of the vanguard and which is contained in the European Perspectives Document. Needless to say, arming a picket line is not always the best tactic to defeat the class enemy. In fact—depending on the relationship of forces and other relevant factors—it can sometimes be the shortest route to the defeat of our class forces in a particular struggle.

Substitutionism

To expose the bankrupt politics of the current leadership of the trade unions is one thing. An integral part of this task must be the construction of a new, class-struggle leadership, having the perspective of replacing the old. Toward this aim we must seek to build a class-struggle left wing inside the unions. In this way the forces of the future revolutionary leadership are gathered together and tested in the course of the class struggle itself.

The labour bureaucrats cannot be effectively fought from the outside of the workers organisations, or by pretending they do not exist and count for nothing. It is necessary to recognise that most of the labour bureaucrats have some kind of a base in the workers movement and it is only by fighting them from within that they will eventually be replaced. The majority leadership of the IMG either reject or do not understand that a major part of our tasks must be the building of class-struggle left wings in the unions. Their line and actions over the past few years have led them to substitute other organisational goals for this task.

For example, for about a year our major orientation was to concentrate on building Claimants Unions (organisations of unemployed workers, persons on welfare, and others either destitute or on very low incomes). The Claimants Unions were influenced mainly by the anarchists and were often initiated by them. These "unions" came into existence when unemployment was drastically increasing but faded out of existence when unemployment dropped sharply. Our orientation, of course, ceased to exist when the Claimants Unions disintegrated.

Because we had no clear programme for our work inside the labour movement, we ended up not giving a political leadership to the unemployed but in giving advice on how they could claim the maximum security benefits. The fundamental error made in this work was to reject the concept that it is the employed workers—with the active help of the unemployed—who play the key and decisive role in the fight for full employment.

When the Claimants Union work fizzled out, without making an appraisal of what had gone wrong, the majority leadership projected another major initiative—the building of Socialist Trade Union Committees. As the name suggests, the idea was to get all socialist working-class militants together in one trade-union committee.

This method was not new in the IMG. It merely followed the approach we had taken previously toward the women's liberation movement. Thinking that all socialist women should get together in one organisation, we tried to build sectarian Socialist Woman Groups. In implementing this policy we found that we attracted few forces other than ourselves and were effectively isolated from the developing women's liberation movement.

Likewise with the Socialist Trade Union Committees. They were primarily initiated by student comrades—some of whom spent a colossal amount of time and effort trying to build up a local Socialist Trade Union Committee, to find that it attracted only ourselves and one or two sympathisers. The concept that these committees could be made viable misled our comrades into thinking that it was possible to bypass the existing trade-union movement. Rather than assisting our comrades to link up

with working-class militants, the Socialist Trade Union Committees isolated us from them.

A recurring theme in the propaganda of the majority leadership is the call for the setting up of "Action Committees." We have in fact been persistently calling for these "Action Committees" for the past few years and without any success.

The apparent reason for advancing this slogan is not that Action Committees flow out of the current stage of the class struggle but because such committees played a dynamic role in the 1926 British General Strike.

The idea behind these "Action Committees" is that if we can get more class-conscious workers (including the the members of other groups) into them, this would put us in a strategically favorable position. Being free from any reformist pressure, it is believed that the participants within these committees would be strongly inclined to take our leadership. Once this process becomes advanced—when "Action Committees" are established on a regional and national scale—we would be well on the way to "outflanking" the bureaucracies of the existing labour movement.

The problem with this schema is that neither the class struggle, union militants, or members of other left-wing organisations are prepared at this stage to conform to the organisational concepts and forms arbitrarily worked out in advance by the IMG majority leadership. The repeated calls for militants to build "Action Committees" have fallen on deaf ears and, of course, we have neither the resources nor the personnel to build them ourselves.

All these organisational initiatives (which comrades were often pressured into initiating regardless of whether there was any real basis for doing so) have one feature in common. They were in fact organisations set up by left wings *outside* of the organised workers movement. They were all substitutes for the real fight it is possible and necessary to conduct. This fight has to be centred around the struggle to build class-struggle left wings inside the trade unions.

For a fighting programme in the unions

The crisis of working-class leadership is posed in the trade unions every time the workers move into big struggles. The traditional leaders of the labour movement are reformist to the core and have a long record of class collaboration with the bosses and their governments. The struggle to build a new and revolutionary leadership in the unions, as elsewhere, is therefore a long-term goal for Trotskyists.

Implicit in the majority leadership's schematic view of the way the class struggle will unfold is the concept that time is too short for any patient and persistent work inside the working-class organisations. Consequently it is not possible to build a class-struggle left wing which will become the alternative revolutionary leadership in the unions. As a substitute for this, the majority leadership looks for organisational shortcuts and ways around the mass organisations. They turn away from the real job that has to be done.

The new leadership which has to be built in the labour movement must be developed around a class-struggle programme that meets the urgent problems and needs of the workers. Inflation and unemployment are the most crucial economic problems faced by the working class today. Central to a class-struggle programme that will enable workers to counter unemployment and protect their wage packets against rising prices must be the transitional demand for a "sliding scale of wages and hours."

This demand leads to a whole series of other demands that are relevant to the current struggles of the working class. These demands include nationalisation under workers control, open the books, factory and consumer committees, equal pay increases, unemployment compensation at union wages and retirement on full pay. At the same time we should demand a programme of public works to guarantee jobs for all. To defeat the Industrial Relations Act and any attempts made by the ruling class to integrate the trade unions into the state apparatus, we should put forward demands like "Hands off the Trade Unions" and "Repeal the Industrial Relations Act."

In addition, we would raise inside the labour movement demands relating to students, apprentices and immigrant workers. These demands would relate to full economic equality, political rights and economic security. We would also raise and fight for specific demands relating to women such as equal job opportunity, equal pay for equal work, 24-hour a day nurseries, the right to abortion and paid maternity leave.

These are just a few examples of the kinds of demands that the more class-conscious workers in the factories will be attracted to, raise, and fight for. These demands indicate the content of the programme that we must put forward in order to build a class-struggle left wing inside the existing workers mass organisations. Struggles around such demands will enable the masses to take their struggle forward.

It will also be necessary to explain the need for the trade unions to give support to the progressive struggles that are part of the deepening radicalisation. We should include in our programme for the unions demands that the British troops be immediately withdrawn from Ireland, that the government cease its attacks on students, that the unions give full support to the women's and Black liberation movements, and that the unions join in actions against the British government's imperialist policy in Asia and Africa.

By promoting and leading such struggles inside the workers movement we can win the most politically advanced workers into the revolutionary party. To do this, however, we must break from the sectarianism and ultra-leftism of the past four years that flowed from the adaptation on the part of the majority leadership to the workerist moods in the "vanguard." We have to reorient our movement to the mass organisations of the class and fight within them for the class-struggle programme outlined above. A major part of this fight inside the unions will include a struggle around demands for workers' democracy. This is the way we will not only outflank but eventually destroy the hold of the bureaucracy.

Our policy for the trade unions must include a call for the re-election of a Labour government. We advocate this despite the bankrupt policy of the Labour Party leadership. To the programme of the Labour Party we counterpose our programme—the revolutionary programme of class struggle.

By fighting for the concepts and method outlined above we will start to sink roots inside the labour movement.

This will enable us to recruit and train more working-class militants as Trotskyist cadres.

TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMME AND PARTY BUILDING: the dividing line between the Tendency and all the other groups

One of the fundamental criticisms made by the minority at the 1969 world congress was that the strategy of rural guerrilla warfare projected for Latin America displaced the method and tasks outlined in the transitional programme. The real "turn" of the 1969 world congress was a turn away from the method of the transitional programme and the Leninist strategy of party building.

The fundamental concept of the transitional programme is that the starting point for the intervention of revolutionists is the objective needs of the working masses. The method of the transitional programme is to lead the masses in struggle around a programme of immediate, democratic and transitional demands so that through their own experiences they see the need for revolutionary actions leading to the conquest of power.

The majority resolution on Latin America substituted for this method its continental schema of rural guerrilla warfare for a prolonged period. This was a turn away from participation in the mass movement, toward small vanguard groups which by their exemplary actions would *show* the masses the revolutionary way forward.

This vanguardist approach was initiated and developed by the IMG majority leadership. The outright rejection by some members of the IMG of the method and tasks of the transitional programme, and the confusion on this question to be seen among others, is the *source* of the differentiation between the Tendency, which was formed in 1970, and all the other groups and currents that have developed within the IMG.

The Tendency was formed with the aim of trying to correct the mistakes which the majority leadership were making in turning away from our mass-action perspective and orientation in defence of the Vietnamese revolution, in revising the Leninist position on the Labour Party, and downplaying the youth radicalisation. The differences have widened over the past 3 to 4 years and now encompass almost every aspect of our work—on Ireland, women's liberation, work in the trade unions, defence work, and how to fight fascism. The root cause of these differences is one of method. Despite general agreement on the analysis of the broad class struggle, we cannot agree on what Trotskyists should be saying and doing today to fully and fruitfully exploit the favourable situation in Britain for us.

Central to these differences over *how* to build the revolutionary party is the role of the transitional programme—its method and the tasks it outlines. The fundamental premise of the transitional programme is for revolutionists to find openings in the class struggle which enable them to intervene in a manner which exposes the inadequacies and failings of capitalism and shows the necessity for workers' power and the superiority of socialism.

To do this we start with whatever is objectively in the interests of the broadest working masses and what must be done to advance the class struggle nationally and internationally. Our task is to mobilise and organise the broadest forces we are capable of reaching and influencing, and lead them in struggle to win concrete demands that correspond both to their needs and prevailing level of consciousness. In this way we advance the struggle and heighten the consciousness of those forces involved.

For example, it is in the objective interests of the Irish and British masses to defeat British imperialism in Ireland. We should, therefore, aim to involve the greatest numbers possible in a struggle against the British government to force it to withdraw its occupation army. It is also in the objective interests of the working masses in Britain to mobilise maximum support to defend and extend their civil rights. We, therefore, aim to build broad defence campaigns to prevent the victimisation of working-class militants and others.

In this process Trotskyists put forward two kinds of fundamental demands—democratic and transitional in character. The Tendency, in its "Tasks and Perspectives Document of the IMG," which it submitted to the 1972 National Conference [reprinted in *SWP Internal Information Bulletin, No. 3 in 1972*], clearly outlines the role of these demands.

"Democratic demands are related to the political rights of the mass of the people. Historically, they were struggled for and partially won during the bourgeois revolution. These include such rights as the right to self-determination, the right to assemble, due process of law, the right to strike, and others.

"But today the bourgeoisie has not only ceased to fight for democratic rights (such as self-determination for Ireland) but more and more the rulers try and take them away. The Industrial Relations Act versus the right to strike, the AIL Trafalgar Square ban versus the right to assemble, [the ban on the Anti-Internment League using Trafalgar Square for demonstrations—AH] the early morning police raids versus the right to be free from arbitrary search and seizure.

"The struggle for democratic rights is a 'bourgeois' struggle only in an historic sense—it was the bourgeoisie that first raised and fought for them. Today it is only the working class and its Marxist vanguard who can be consistent defenders of and champions of all struggles for democratic rights. And it is only a workers state that can finish this historic task. Thus democratic tasks are *our* tasks. They must be fought for by proletarian class struggle methods and not by bourgeois reformist methods (by independent mass mobilisations rather than dependence on parliamentary reform and judicial decision).

"Transitional demands indicate the solution to the economic and social needs of the working class which capitalism cannot grant. They lead towards challenging capitalist property rights and the bourgeois state. Such demands include the right to a job, the right to decent pay, housing, social security, etc. Transitional demands, such as a sliding scale of hours and a sliding scale of wages, pertain to the socialist economy of the future and are only realisable under it.

"Democratic demands and transitional demands are related in two ways. The first is that capitalism has reached the point where it becomes more and more incompatible with any form of democracy. The defence and extension of democracy thus become proletarian tasks along with the advancement of transitional measures that go beyond

capitalism although stemming from its present point of development.

"The second and more important way in which democratic and transitional demands are related is in the method by which we defend and advance them. The method is the same in both instances—the proletarian method of mass struggle. The heart of this method is mobilisation of the masses assembled by capitalism as the human basis of its mode of production. The Transitional Programme deals with the problem of organising and developing this type of struggle and carrying it forward to its final conclusion in the victory of socialism." (p. 85-86)

Today when so many exploited and oppressed layers of society—workers, women, immigrants, blacks, youth—are seeking ways to defend and extend their democratic rights and to end their exploitation and oppression, revolutionists strive to be in the forefront of these struggles. Our aim is to give leadership to take these struggles forward in an anticapitalist direction. This is the way both to develop revolutionary consciousness and to recruit and train the cadres necessary for the mass revolutionary party. It is the *method* of the transitional programme.

The rejection of democratic demands

The IMG majority leadership explicitly reject this method. They reject organising around democratic demands, wrongly thinking them to be "liberal" and reformist. The 1971 national conference document of the majority, "No We Haven't All the Time in the World," shows the tremendous confusion of the majority leadership at that time:

"Revolutionaries are duty bound to support all the struggles of the masses—despite their limited nature and reformist or nationalist leaderships. We, therefore, support all democratic and reformist demands providing they have the function of stimulating mass struggle. We will always join such struggles ourselves.

"We, on the other hand, do not ourselves intervene by advancing a programme of democratic or reformist demands. In whatever field we are operating (as distinct from giving general support from the outside) we struggle for a transitional programme. In the course of doing this we will, naturally, say that we support or even adopt the democratic or reformist demands of others. But these latter demands will not be the kernel of our intervention. . .

"The essential difference between a democratic reformist demand and a transitional demand is that the former operates within the acceptance of the *status quo,* whilst the latter challenges the foundations of bourgeois power. A transitional slogan should also be distinquished from a full or revolutionary demand (the so-called full programme) in that it takes a particular problem facing the workers and instead of explaining that a social revolution is necessary to solve it makes a call for something which can seem 'reasonable' and 'fair' to the workers concerned. In other words a reformist or democratic demand is one which argues about the share of the cake under capitalism, a full demand says that the capitalist is not entitled to any cake at all and a transitional slogan insists that the sharing of the cake would be under the control of the workers.

". . . we sometimes find that what appears to be an elementary slogan can become a transitional one in certain circumstances. For instance the slogan 'the Postworkers must win' had such a character during the postal strike, the key think being that it counterposed the power of the bourgeois state machine to workers power. . . .

"The transitional slogan is essentially directed at the advanced workers rather than the mass of the workers. We aim to win our influence indirectly through the medium of the advanced workers. Therefore our slogans are not determined by what the average worker will feel as feasible."

Out of all this confusion three main points come through:

1. Democratic demands are for reformists to champion.
2. Trotskyists fight only for transitional demands.
3. Transitional demands are directed towards the advanced workers. All three of these conclusions are dead wrong.

No wonder we cannot begin to build a mass solidarity campaign in defence of the Irish struggle for the *democratic* right of self-determination and reject the demand "Withdraw British Troops" as "liberal." Although if the reformists in the labour movement initiate a Troops Out Movement on Ireland, we will condescend to tailend it. No wonder we cannot do any effective defence work around the issue of political prisoners and other victims of the class struggle. No wonder we have failed to build a defence campaign around the banning of Ernest Mandel from Germany, Switzerland and France and left it to people outside the IMG to do what they could to protest the ban.

The IMG majority leadership reject the concept that the struggle for rights like the right to strike and the struggle for self-determination in Ireland, the right of women to control their bodies, can be the starting points for developing mass actions which can evolve and develop, posing new demands that help raise anticapitalist consciousness. The key is the mobilization of masses in struggle.

The concept put forward in the 1971 national conference document that transitional demands are essentially directed at the advanced workers rather than the mass of the workers is fundamentally in opposition to the position outlined by Trotsky in the transitional programme:

"It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between the present demands and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands. . . ."

The tasks of the transitional programme (as Trotsky explains) lie in the "systematic mobilisation of the masses for proletarian revolution" (*Transitional Programme*). To consider that transitional demands are "essentially for the advanced workers" is an *elitist* concept in contradiction to the Marxist concept that it's the *masses* who must be prepared and ready to struggle for the socialist revolution. The revolutionary party can lead a socialist revolution but it cannot make one, neither can the "vanguard," nor can the advanced workers by themselves. We should never lose sight of the fact that if the masses don't make the socialist revolution, there won't be one—the socialist revolution will be made by the majority of the oppressed, not by a minority. The task of the vanguard party is to

lead the socialist revolution to victory, not try to substitute itself for the masses.

Transitional method under attack

Alan Jones, generally regarded as the most prominent theoretician of the IMG and currently its main leader, gave us his wrong-headed appreciation of transitional demands in his 1971 national conference document, "On the 'Theory' of Democratic and Transitional Demands and Other Stupidities":

"As we have noted, a transitional demand is one which poses the question of state power. But a mass movement of the working class on a demand which poses the question of state power is precisely a *revolutionary situation.* In other words a mass movement of the working class on a transitional slogan is not possible outside a revolutionary situation. . . .

"We have already noted that a mass mobilisation of the working class cannot occur on a transitional demand outside a revolutionary situation."

Comrade Jones elaborates his ideas further in the 1972 National Conference Perspectives Document, which he co-authored with Comrade Tariq Ali [reprinted in *SWP Internal Information Bulletin,* No. 3 in 1972]:

". . . a transitional programme by definition smashes the bourgeois state, i.e. the social relations of capitalist production of the state machine which defends them. There therefore exists no transitional programmes for 'sectors' e.g. women, blacks, students, etc. but only a transitional programme for the whole of society (within such a programme there are of course demands relating to the position of various social groups, but these are not demands 'for' sections of the population)."

Revolutionaries recognise that the aim of the revolutionary party must be to unite all the oppressed and exploited and their allies behind one programme—the programme for socialist revolution. At the same time it is essential to recognise that different layers of society have special interests—e.g., the West Indian workers in Britain who because they are Black are doubly exploited as workers and as Blacks. Therefore, it is necessary to formulate specific demands which take into account the special nature of their oppression. In other words, we see the transitional programme as the programme which unites all those forces that will struggle for socialism.

This method of combining the particular with the general and fundamental is totally rejected in the 1972 Perspectives Document. The authors of the Document consider that the Socialist Workers Party in the United States, because it has developed and enriched the transitional programme in relation to its work among Blacks, women and students, has developed a reformist orientation. In this Perspectives Document they write:

". . . *In the case of the SWP this method is applied logically* and leads to the approach of *mass* (i.e. mobilising function) *single-issue* (i.e. considered in isolation with confusion of where intervening and on what intervening economism) campaign on *democratic and transitional* (i.e. accepting capitalism/reformist) demands. In our case the influence of the Bensaid and Scalabrino methodology prevented us from going the whole hog, and instead we finished up with the miserable electic hodge-podge whose results have already been described. What we have to do now is to break this empiricist methodology once and for all. This is what makes the theoretical points outlined at the beginning of this document of immediate *practical* importance and not a mere nit-picking. What in fact happens with the methodology of the SWP document, (a) Reformist programmes (b) talking to sectors only as the problem on sectors and in short a tendency to *adapt* to various petty-bourgeois movements."

It is precisely this rejection of the method of the transitional programme that has seriously damaged the ability of the IMG to take advantage of the new openings in the class struggle. In describing the transitional method, the IMG majority leadership have moved in a sectarian direction. In the *Transitional Program* Trotsky warns of these sectarian dangers:

"At their base lies a refusal to struggle for partial and democratic demands, i.e., for the elementary interests and needs of the working masses, as they are today. Preparing for the revolution means to the sectarians, convincing themselves of the superiority of socialism. . . .

"These sterile politicians generally have no need of a bridge in the form of transitional demands because they do not intend to cross over to the other shore. They simply dawdle in one place, satisfying themselves with a repetition of the self-same meagre abstractions."

Impeded by such a sectarian method, the IMG majority leadership have cut themselves off from the possibility of actively giving day-to-day leadership to the real struggles that break out. This default leaves the initiative with the Social Democrats and Stalinists who seek to derail these movements into the deadend of reformism. The result has been major missed opportunities for Trotskyism and party building in Britain.

Revising Lenin's concept of the combat party

If revolutionists cannot raise and fight for democratic demands, if the masses cannot be mobilised on a transitional demand outside of a revolutionary situation, what kind of demands do we put forward to "mobilise the masses" in our day-to-day work? Perhaps we should not be concerned with "mobilising the masses." Perhaps this is not the function of a revolutionary party outside of a revolutionary situation. Perhaps the party has another role. This is precisely the conclusion reached in the IMG majority 1972 Perspectives Document. For it, the primary task of the party is "to explain ideas" and not make "calls to action."

It claims that "Lenin specifically and at great length rejects the idea that it is the task of the party to call the masses to action. Lenin declares that he agrees completely with Plekhanov's formulation that the task of the party is to explain ideas to people. . . ." They continue:

"Once this point of Lenin's is understood, i.e. that the party does not 'call the masses to action' or 'mobilise' them then of course the problem we posed about the transitional programme disappears. It is perfectly possible to present a programme which destroys capitalism at any time, it is only if you conceive the party as calling the masses to action or the function of the party as mobilising the masses that you land yourself in either a bordigist

or Tendency position."

It is logical that, given the confusion of some comrades and the outright rejection by others of the transitional programme, that the next step would be to revise Leninism on the nature and tasks of the Bolshevik Party. Comrades Alan Jones and Tariq Ali reject the essential nature of the Leninist party as a *combat* party, with cadres deeply rooted in the class struggle who are able to give leadership to the masses and mobilise them in their day-by-day struggles against all forms of exploitation and oppression. They do not see that in this way the entire class struggle is turned into a school in which the masses gain in political understanding and in which the cadres of the mass revolutionary party are shaped and recruited. Instead they see the role of the party as solely a propagandist one, "explaining ideas." Presumably, on this prescription, when sufficient ideas have been "explained" and accepted by the masses, they will spontaneously make the socialist revolution.

This approach to party building has been tried and found wanting many times. The Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB), for example, has been doing this for the past fifty years or so. No one will disagree that today the SPGB has zero influence on the class struggle in Britain.

The approach of Jones and Ali is diametrically opposed to the method outlined by Trotsky in the transitional programme. In practice it means putting forward "maximalist" demands—relating to the consciousness of the most advanced layers, the "vanguard." This isolates the advanced layers from the masses and deprives them of revolutionary leadership.

This sectarian approach flows from the adaptations which the IMG majority leadership have made to pressures from the "vanguard" over the past 3 to 4 years. In adapting to the political weaknesses of sections of this "vanguard," we made our starting point the "concerns" of these "vanguard" layers instead of the needs and interests of the broad working masses. This wrong starting point has meant that the majority leadership have given up building united-front-type single issue coalitions on issues like Ireland and Vietnam. They wrongly thought that the "vanguard" has developed beyond such elementary anti-imperialist issues.

Adaptation to workerism also led the IMG majority leadership to develop a narrow, schematic view of the class struggle. They wrongly viewed the struggles of women, students, immigrants and Blacks as being "peripheral" to the authentic class struggle. The majority leadership, therefore, saw no purpose in raising and fighting for demands which related to the special interests of these sectors. This has resulted in the IMG's failure to provide any leadership for the women's liberation movement that started to develop in the late 1960's. We have remained on the periphery of this movement, which continues to open great possibilities for us. The majority leadership also failed to give leadership to the upsurge in student struggles and turned away from the youth radicalisation by giving up the independent Trotskyist youth organisation. By adapting to the changing moods and political weaknesses of the "vanguard" the majority leadership also revised the Leninist position on the Labour Party, the touchstone of class politics in Britain.

Correct the line—apply the method of the transitional programme

Through adapting to the "concerns" of this "vanguard," the majority leadership of the IMG have rejected the fundamental concepts of the transitional programme and have begun to revise the role of the revolutionary party. This has seriously disoriented and miseducated the membership of the British section and those we have been able to influence. We have missed out on many opportunities to advance the class struggle, gain new recruits and educate them in the Leninist concepts of party building. It is true that we have increased our size significantly since the last world congress. But all of our opponents on the left have also made considerable numerical gains. Some, like the International Socialists, have grown at a much faster rate and are around eight times as big. The test for our section in Britain is to be able to increase our size at the *expense* of the other left-wing groups. The only way we will change the relationship of forces is by correctly applying the method of the transitional programme to the concrete issues of the class struggle in Britain today.

In order to alter the balance of forces between ourselves and other left groups we must be ready to take the initiative in building united actions around clear class-struggle issues. It will be necessary to fight against organisational exclusion and to keep such struggles independent of the reformist bureaucracies. This is what was done initially with the VSC and what must be done to build a mass movement in solidarity with the Irish revolution. This is the general approach we will have to use to lay the basis for a class-struggle left wing in the unions, advance the struggle for women's liberation, and take the student struggles to a higher level.

We are unable to choose the field of battle at will. In the class struggle, battles break out as a consequence of forces over which we have no control at the present stage of our development. As a revolutionary socialist group we have no choice but to engage in these battles. But it is only by using the transitional method as our fundamental guide to our political activity today that we will win political hegemony within these movements and take the next steps toward the construction of the mass workers party capable of leading the successful struggle against capitalism.

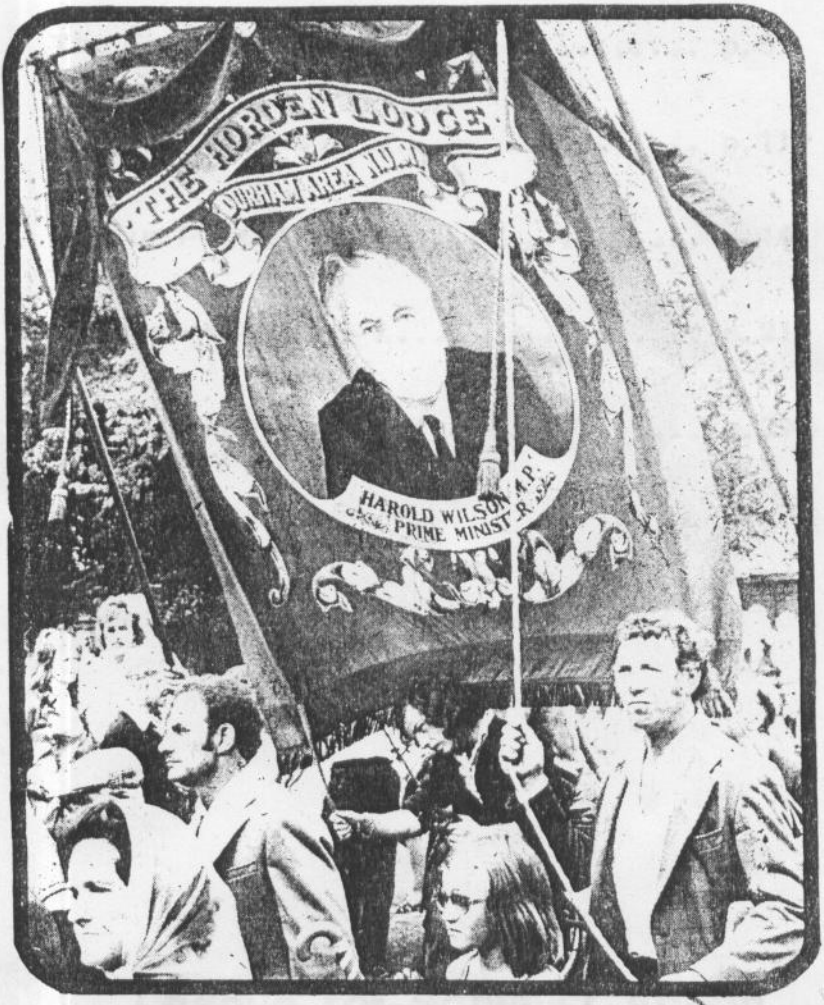
The first prerequisite is that the guerrilla warfare line projected for Latin America at the last world congress must be reversed. The next necessary step is the rejection of "The Building of Revolutionary Parties in Capitalist Europe." There is no lack of evidence in the experience of the IMG in Britain to expose the errors of this document now up for consideration. Its general line with its "vanguardist" orientation has been carried out by the British section since the 1969 world congress with grievous results.

The opportunities for British Trotskyists have never been more favourable than they are today. To take full advantage of them it is necessary to draw all the lessons of the past period and correct the mistakes that have been made at their source.

September 28, 1973

The LABOUR PARTY

Which Way?



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League for Socialist Action

Introduction

In March 1964, the first Labour government in almost two decades was elected. Its honeymoon period proved short-lived. Within a few years, the Wilson government was engaged in a bitter six-weeks struggle with the seamen. It was the opening skirmish in a growing battle between government and unions as Wilson sought to impose a draconian wage freeze, promote 'productivity deals' and hamstring the unions through **In Place of Strife**.

The disillusion that swept through union ranks – as ever-wider layers were drawn into struggle against 'their' government – was not limited to the labour movement. Thousands of youth, outraged at Wilson's slavish support for Nixon's genocidal war in Vietnam, took to the streets in mass protest. Black immigrants saw a supposedly Labour government come to a deal with the apartheid regime in Rhodesia and the oppressed minority in Northern Ireland, struggling for democratic rights, was confronted in 1969 with the entry of British troops onto the streets of Derry and Belfast.

This growing alienation of the government from its popular base, prompting thousands of activists to drift out of the party in the years that followed, soon sparked off an ongoing debate on the Labour Party in radical circles. Exactly what sort of party was it, after all? Was it a 'gain' to be defended on the road to socialism or merely an obstacle? Were figures such as Wilson doomed to retain control over the party – a party built by the unions to defend their interests – or could it be 'changed' by actions such as that recently taken by the Newham CLP to 'drop' Prentice?

These questions, it should be pointed out, were not particularly new. They had been debated back and forth within the labour movement ever since the creation of the Labour Party, at the turn of the century, as marxists sought to define an orientation towards it. The discussion that echoed in radical circles around the 1970 election – and which is still with us today – was merely a belated repetition of that which had already shaken the young Communist Party or, earlier still, the socialist movement around Hyndeman in the 1900s.

If the questions posed were not particularly new, nor were the answers which tended to fall into the same one-sided and confused positions of the past. This is not altogether surprising since the marxist left came very strongly under the influence of the radicalised youth who had very little understanding of the labour movement and who saw only its 'negative' (i.e. bureaucratised) character. Under this influence, the left began to suggest that the Labour Party was 'changing its nature', was evolving into a mere electoral machine along the lines of the Democratic Party in the USA rapidly being by-passed, in action, by the workers' movement. This attitude, which was to lead during the 1970 election period to a near-abstentionist position, merely repeated the sectarian position of earlier socialist currents who had likewise been unable to understand the complex nature of the Labour Party.

Despite the calls to 'abstain', however, the Labour Party was not to disappear that easily. Despite the radical rhetoric from the left, over eleven million workers continued to vote Labour in that election and, four years later, to elect a minority Labour government in the midst of a political crisis provoked by the Tories in response to the miners' strike. No doubt the fact that millions of workers continued to vote Labour *despite* the experience of the 1964-70 Wilson governments was inexplicable to those who had written off Labour as hardly different from the Tories or who had interpreted the mass struggles of the late sixties as the beginning of a political break from 'Labourism'.

It was inexplicable, however, only to those who 'overlooked' the tremendous

loyalty in the labour movement towards the party which it had built. Such a loyalty was not only able to overcome the disillusion of the Wilson experience but of every successive Labour government prior to that one. Wilson's support for the US invasion of Vietnam was no 'worse', after all, than the Attlee government's endorsement of the US invasion of Korea. His attempt to create an incomes policy backed up with penalties against strikers was no different in kind from Attlee's 'voluntary' pay ceiling of one per cent and attempt to haul striking dockers off before the courts.

The source of this loyalty is not, as cynics might suggest, to be found in the 'magical powers' of the labour bureaucrats or in the congenital inability of the workers' movement to learn from its experience and build a new leadership capable of responding to its needs. Socialists subscribe neither to a belief in magic or genetics. It is to be found in the fact that, despite the militancy of the labour movement, despite its combativity and willingness to struggle, it remains tied to the Labour Party because that party represents, to this day, its political level. While willing to down tools in their thousands, the mass labour movement still believes that it is possible to defend (and extend) living standards and rights through reforms within the parliamentary system. It is within this framework that continued loyalty to Labour – despite the experience of successive governments – must be found.

Mass struggles in the coming period will undoubtedly put severe strains upon this loyalty as they have often done in the past, recently pushing certain unions to threaten disaffiliation in response to Castle's **In Place of Strife**. They will not automatically break it, however, as Trotsky realised long before when pointing out that a 'spontaneous radicalisation of the trade unions, making a profound move among the masses, is quite inadequate in itself to free the working class from the leadership of Thomas and MacDonald'.[1] History has more than confirmed Trotsky's viewpoint. Despite the disillusion and cynicism with figures from MacDonald to Wilson, the labour movement has not spontaneously changed its allegiance. Historically, the Labour Party has managed to survive debacles like 1929 or 1964 without any substantial loss of support. The reason for this is simply that disillusion with the Labour bureaucrats is not the same as a break with the type of politics these people represent – the politics of reformism – which continue to tie them to the Labour Party.

A correct understanding of this loyalty – its roots in a certain political outlook – is central if socialists are, in the coming period, to intervene seriously in the broad struggles that will arise. Only by understanding what this loyalty represents will socialists be able to consciously structure the discontent (that will certainly grow) around demands that can lead layers into struggle with the reformist bureaucrats and towards a socialist perspective.

The reason why this has not developed before is mainly due to the inability of the marxist left – from Hyndeman's Social-Democratic Federation onwards – to understand exactly what the Labour Party represents in the consciousness of working people who built it. This inability has either pushed them into the twin errors of standing sectarianly aloof from the party (as many left groups did during the 1970 election) or of dissolving themselves in it and adapting to those very anti-Labour forces they set out to combat. The history of the socialist movement is littered with the corpses of such organisations whose names are scarcely remembered today. There is reason to believe that the antics of many left groups today will ensure that their names will be added to this 'roll of honour'.

The task of this pamphlet is to develop a clear understanding of the Labour Party – a rounded understanding – that will ensure socialists intervene in the deepening struggles ahead with a serious strategy.

A. D. Roberts

The Early Years

a) A 'bureaucratic manoeuvre'?

Writing in the *Red Mole* in 1970, a few months before the general election, Robin Blackburn dismissed the early Labour Party as a 'bureaucratic manoeuvre'. Facility almost always has the knack of distorting the truth. The Labour Party was not hatched (as Blackburn implies) in the committee rooms of the then equivalents of Harold Wilson or Reg Prentice. It was born *despite such figures* out of the escalating struggles of the labour movement, at the turn of the century, and the hesitant understanding of ever-wider layers of a common interest to defend.

The creation of the Labour Party took place, interestingly enough, in a period similar to our own in several respects. Its seeds were embedded in a decade of shocks and upheavals sparked off by the growing threat to Britain's dominance in world trade by the rising industrial powers of Germany and the USA[2]. In order to retain their slackening grip over the world market, in the teeth of fierce competition, British employers resorted to a well co-ordinated attack upon workers' living standards and rights almost identical to the one we have witnessed over the past period.

An intensive drive was heralded to lower working conditions, introduce 'speed-up' (productivity deals), abolish 'restrictive practices' and break the backs of the unions which had grown enormously in the preceding years among semi-skilled workers such as miners, gasmen and dockers. (Between 1885 and 1890 alone, trade union membership had tripled[3]). Such an offensive, coupled with an attempt by employers to create a ready pool of scab labour in the National Free Labour Association, gave rise throughout the 1890s to a whole wave of 'lock-outs' and 'provoked' strikes. Chief among these were the Lancashire cotton workers strike of 1893, the miners' strikes of 1894 and 1898 and the engineering workers' lock-out of 1897 which resulted in the imposition of the humiliating York Memorandum.

The impact of these struggles upon the consciousness of the labour movement, particularly the newly-unionised sectors which lacked the more conservative approach of the older, craft unions, should not be minimised. They gave birth, slowly and hesitatingly, to a growing awareness among more militant layers of the common interests of the labour movement which had to be independently defended. Up to that point in time, as Pelling suggests, 'there had been little concept of "Labour" as a distinct class in the community'[4] and there was often intense hostility between the semi-skilled and older, craft unions. The offensive launched by the employers, increasingly centralised through the creation of Employers' Federations[5], slowly began to overcome craft and sectional differences as unions increasingly identified together around the need to defend the *cause of labour* as a distinct and independent force.

Even though this process was most obvious, in the initial stages, among the newly-unionised sectors of the labour movement, it gradually spread to the more craft-conscious unions whose interests were clearly endangered by attacks upon trade union autonomy which reached a climax in the Taff Vale Judgement of 1901.[6] This 'judgement', which forced the railwaymens' union to pay the employers damages for all losses incurred during strike action, was seen to have much wider implications. It was clearly recognised as a threat not only to the railwaymen's union but to *trade unionism* itself since, if any union could be made to legally compensate a company for losses incurred during industrial action, the unions were rendered virtually powerless.

It was in response to such attacks, in response to attacks upon the unions no longer on a sectional but on a national basis, that the fertile ground was created on which the propaganda of early socialist groupings such as the Social Democratic Fed-

eration and the Independent Labour Party (long campaigning for a 'workingmen's party') was to fall. The growing awareness among the unions of common interests to defend – those of the labour movement – began to drive a wedge through the 'marriage of convenience' which had hitherto caused the unions to clutch at the apron-strings of the Liberal Party.

Up to that point in time, the majority of the unions (particularly the craft unions) had trailed electorally behind the Liberals in much the same way as, today, the labour movement in the USA supports the Democratic Party. The unions advocated support for the Liberals in exchange for the latters' policy of 'free trade' (under which cheap food rates were guaranteed) and a less 'antagonistic' attitude towards the labour movement. The sharp offensive launched by the employers, however, cementing a growing awareness in the labour movement of its class interests, pushed growing layers in the unions to break from their alliance with 'liberalism' and seek an independent political voice. They were encouraged in this by the partial success of the Irish Nationalists (under Parnell) whose independent initiatives had concentrated attention upon the 'Irish question'.

Such a process did not, of course, take place overnight. Unions such as the NUM only decided to break from the Liberals as late as 1908. Nevertheless it was out of this growing awareness of a common class interest that had to be defended that, in 1899, the **Labour Representation Committee** was formed. The LRC, sponsored by a loose federation of trade unions and socialist currents [7], set itself, it is true, very limited objectives. It wasn't even sure whether its aim was to set up a party, let alone a party based upon clear socialist principles. Its aims, as originally defined, were as limited and fuzzy as they are today when it was decided it should "... *ensure that working class opinion should be represented in the House of Commons by men sympathetic with the aims and demands of the labour movement and whose candidatures are promoted by one or other of the organised movements*".

Behind these unclear and hesitating words, however, lay a radical change in consciousness by important layers of the labour movement which 'marxists' such as Robin Blackburn contemptuously dismissed when comparing Labour with the Democratic Party in the USA.[8] A radical change because, in the decision to promote candidates "sympathetic with the aims and demands of the labour movement" lay the awareness of these layers of the need to create for themselves a political voice representing their interests as opposed to those of the ruling class.

Far from diminishing, of course, this awareness has increased over the years so that today the Labour Party has a virtual monopoly over the labour movement. It receives the overwhelming number of its membership (6½ million) by affiliation through union ranks, over 85% of its finances, excluding constituencies, from the unions and the substantial bulk of its voting strength from the same source.

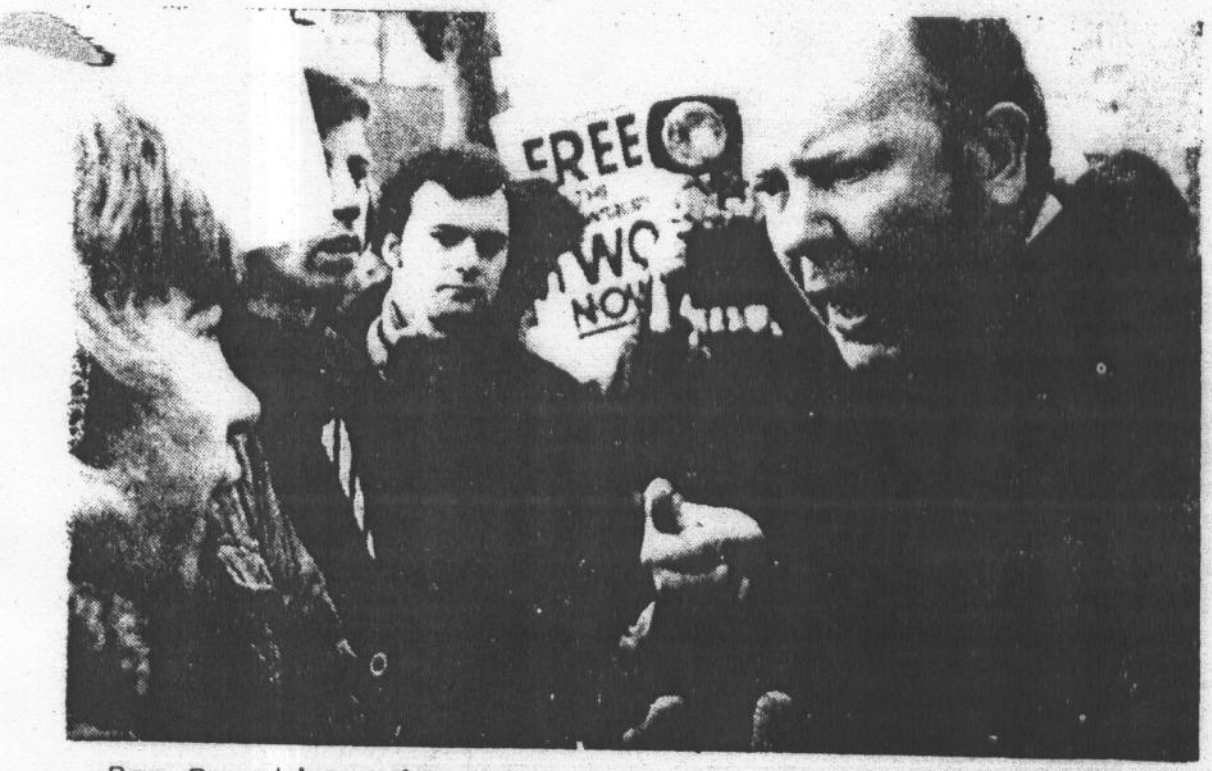
This fact should not be under-estimated by those (particularly outside the labour movement) who see only its negative features as represented in the figures of Prentice or Jenkins today. The Labour Party symbolised, in its creation, an important step forward in the awareness of millions of workers, an awareness of themselves *as a class* with distinct interests *as a class* which had to be fought for not only at an industrial but also at a political level. This is the reason why Lenin (in an article presaging his later polemic with the sectarian positions of the young Communist Party) was to describe it as "... the first step on the part of the really proletarian organisations of England towards a conscious class policy and towards a *socialist* Labour Party".[9]

It might not appear such a 'step' forward if measured purely in terms of the policies implemented by successive governments elected to office. If measured in terms of the consciousness of the labour movement which built it and continues to support it – a key criterion – it was and remains a substantial gain.

b) The 'Fabian' stamp

Reminiscing on the Labour Party, George Wardle, NEC chairman and minister in Lloyd George's post-1914 war cabinet, was to write: ". . . from the very first, the ties which bound the party together were of the loosest possible kind. It has steadily, and in my opinion wisely, always declined to be bound by any programme, to subscribe to any dogma or to lay down any creed". Whatever may be though of the 'wisdom' of Wardle's opinion, it offers an insight into the unique character of the party from its earliest days.

Unlike every other party claiming to represent workers' interests in Europe, the Labour Party was not formed on clear political principles. Unlike the German Social-Democratic Party, for example, it was not built around a socialist programme heavily indebted to marxism, but developed much more empirically out of the gradual and hesitating steps of the unions to find a political defence against the employers' offensive. Both Lenin and Trotsky (the latter in his discussion on the possibility of a



Reg Prentice: 'ousted' from the Newham Constituency Labour Party

Labour Party arising in the USA) were to stress this unique feature.

The fact that the Labour Party was, in a very real sense, the 'child of the unions', groping uncertainly forward, is central to understanding its nature and evolution. It meant primarily that the will of those layers of newly-unionised workers, struggling to create an independent political voice, was mediated through the trade union bureaucracy which had strengthened itself particularly in the last few decades of the last century, as Brian Pearce indicates, and who "saw their task as essentially one of peaceful negotiation with the employers".[11] While acting under pressure from their membership, the union bureaucracy continually acted as a brake upon this development and sought to contain the LRC within a framework politically acceptable to them. They were aided in this by their intellectual 'allies' breaking from the decaying corpse

of Liberalism (notably the Fabians around Sidney and Beatrice Webb) who helped mould the orientation of the young party.

The political outlook of the labour bureaucracy with their "whole network of social relations separating them off from their original class" could be sharply detected at the opening of the LRC. The resolution put forward by Hyndeman's SDF calling for a party *"based on the recognition of the class struggle and having as its aim the nationalisation of the means of production"* was unceremoniously defeated. This was far too extreme for the trade union leaders and ex-Liberal allies trying to contain the upswell in working class activity which had already pushed them this far down the road.

It was replaced by the ILP proposal (in which the Fabians played a key role) that the new party would *"willingly co-operate with any party which, for the time being, may be engaged in promoting legislation in the interests of labour"*. Such a perspective, led, in the early years, to electoral blocks with the Liberals whereby in many constituencies both sides agreed not to contest each others' candidates. More generally, it laid the basis for the party's operation in the Commons until 1924 as a mere prop for the Liberals, prompting left-winger Lansbury to exclaim, "I do not know a single question of legislation on which the Labour Party has managed to disassociate itself from the Liberals".

The myth recently encouraged by certain left groups – such as the International Socialists – that the anti-working class policies of the Wilson government prove that, in some mysterious way, the Labour Party has 'changed its nature' just do not hold water.[12] An anti-working class leadership, willing to co-operate with forces hostile to the labour movement, has been a constant feature of the party since its inception over 70 years ago. Prentice and Jenkins, with their hints of the need for a 'national government', have their ancestors as far back as the founders of the LRC.

The main function of this leadership – an amalgam of trade union bureaucrats and intellectuals of the Fabian stamp – has, throughout the years, been to contain and discourage all independent activity on the part of the workers' movement. It has acted consistently as what De Leon's concisely called "labour lieutenants of capital" within the workers' movement, breeding respect for law and order, re-inforcing the myth of 'parliamentary change' and teaching that the interests of its class base are not so much opposed to the present system as dependent upon its well-being. Reg Prentice's attack upon the Shrewsbury building workers for 'breaking the law' can be traced back to the Fabian's position on the 1926 General Strike where Beatrice Webb condescendingly explained "On the whole, I think it was a proletarian distemper which had to run its course and, like other distempers, it is as well to have done with it at the cost of a lengthy convalescence".

The fact that this leadership has been rooted in the party from its creation cannot be explained away as the result of any 'backroom manoeuvres' as Robin Blackburn suggested. The class-collaborationist policies of the leadership were not sneaked in behind the backs of the labour movement by a clandestine group of Fabian intellectuals and trade union bureaucrats, although this is not to say that such figures were not the conscious promoters of such policies in the ferment that went into the party's early years. The roots of this leadership are, in the final analysis, to be found in the political consciousness of the labour movement which, while seeing the need to defend its own class interests, still retained deep illusions in the possibility of so doing through parliamentary reform. In this sense, the party reflected both the *strengths* and *weaknesses* of the labour movement which was groping towards the need for a political voice but not yet a socialist one.

This is the meaning of Trotsky's acute observation in his study **'Where is Britain Going'** on the nature of the break from Liberalism which was, let us recall, a long drawn-out process. If, he pointed out, the Labour Party represents a "priceless histor-

ical achievement", it should not be overlooked that the unions which created it were "disillusioned rather as to the goodwill of the Liberals than as to the democratic-pacifist methods of solving social problems'.[13] While the unions, struggling against the employers' offensive, had seen the need to defend their class interests through an independent political party, that party was still dominated by the outlook of Liberalism; i.e. of seeking reforms within the parliamentary system.

It is such an ideological outlook – which accepts the framework of the present system as its arena of activity and merely seeks reforms within it – which has allowed the Labour bureaucrats to retain control over the workers' movement down to the present day. They have, of course, been 'aided' in this by the historical inability of the marxist movement to implement an orientation towards the Labour Party which can combine both an appreciation of the gain it represents (in terms of the consciousness of the labour movement) with a ruthless struggle against its leadership.

c) Obstacle or Gain

Writing in **International Socialism** 43, just prior to the 1970 general election, Peter Sedgewick was to unhesitatingly describe the Labour Party as an 'open agency of capitalist rule'. Sedgewick's position, whose widespread acceptance by the left resulted in a political line verging on abstentionism, was not new. It was merely the continuation in a new form of the one-sided and simplistic notions of the marxist left which can be traced back to the origins of the Labour Party 75 years ago.

It is, of course, true that the Labour Party in no way represents a socialist party despite the adoption, in 1918, of Clause 4 which has been the source of bitter inter-party feuds over the years.[14] It is, and always has been, dominated by an anti-working class leadership imbued with the ideology of reformism, – an ideology which accepts the status quo and merely seeks reforms within it. In this sense, it is an 'agency of capitalist rule' since refusal to challenge the system 'forces' the leadership, in times of economic downturn, to call upon their mass base to make that system 'work' again. Reforms are dependent upon sacrifices as was most clear in MacDonald's decision, in 1929, to cut the dole at a time when there were over two million unemployed.

Recognition of this fact in no way, however, makes the Labour Party identical with the Tories any more than the TUC, at present collaborating in a voluntary wage freeze against its members, is identical to the CBI. To make such an identification, as sections of the marxist left tended to do at the time of the last election, is to divorce the Labour Party from its social roots. Despite its limitations which render it clearly an obstacle on the path to socialism, the Labour Party was born out of profound struggles and advances in consciousness and is thus, at the same time, a gain towards an independent political voice.

It is this duality of the Labour Party - what Lenin summarised in the phrase a 'bourgeois Labour Party' – which has never sensitively been grasped by the marxist movement in Britain. It is the failure to grasp the party's dual character, as a gain as well as an obstacle in the struggle for socialism, which is the reason why, over seventy years after its creation, the marxist left remains marginal to political life while the Labour Party has continued to grow in size and influence. Without such a rounded understanding, it has proved impossible to effectively intervene in the labour movement and implement a strategy for breaking the grip of the labour bureaucrats over ever–wider layers. Sectarianism, a fear of 'adapting' to the reformist ideology of the labour movement, has been the major impediment. Such an attitude has, historically, let the labour bureaucrats off the hook since it has isolated the marxist movement from the ranks of the labour movement *who are still loyal to Labour* and who regard it as their party.

Such an attitude could be detected very early on in Hyndeman's Social Democratic Federation which split from the LRC only a few years after its creation. It

came under heavy fire for its sectarian leanings from Marx and Engels who pointed out in a letter to Florence Kelly as early as 1886: "A million or two workingmens' votes for a bone fide workingmen's party is worth more at present than a hundred thousand votes for a doctrinally perfect platform" [15]

The tradition set by the SDF was to find a reflection in the early Communist Party (one of whose components, the British Socialist Party, had emerged from the SDF). Willie Gallagher's dismissal of the Labour Party as coming more and more "under the influence of middle–class liberals" set the tone for the orientation in the initial years. It was Lenin in particular who had to polemicise with such an infantile attitude (which went so far as to refuse voting Labour in elections) by pointing out that the Labour Party was a 'peculiar party', a party which may be led by the 'worst reactionaries' but which was also made up of "all the trade unions which now have a membership of over four millions". [16]

Calling upon the Communist Party to affiliate to the Labour Party, he stressed that support for the Labour Party was a step forward in working class consciousness was a pre–requisite for being able to implement a real struggle against its clearly reformist leaders. "*We must first*", he pointed out "*help Snowden and Henderson to beat Lloyd George and Churchill*" in order that "*the majority of the working class will be convinced by their own experience that we are right, i.e. that the Hendersons and Snowdens are absolutely good for nothing, that they are petty–bourgeois and treacherous by nature....*" [17]

Lenin's advice, grounded in an understanding of the dual character of the party, is as applicable today as it was over fifty years ago since, in all fundamental aspects, the Labour Party has not changed. It is particularly applicable to the left which, reacting impressionistically to Wilson's period in office from 1964–70, repeated the sectarian errors of the past. Blackburn's comparison of the Labour Party to the Democratic Party or Sedgewick's analysis of it as an 'open agency of capitalist rule' were merely crude reflections of Gallagher's earlier mistakes. Such mistakes, which over–simplified the Labour Party and saw only its negative side, disarmed the left *as it has traditionally been disarmed* in its ability to intervene in the ongoing radicalisation and put forward a strategy, based upon the consciousness of the majority of the labour movement, to struggle against the reformist leaders.

These latter will not be removed by ignoring the Labour Party, by denouncing it from the sidelines or hoping that struggles will 'somehow' bypass it. History has proved the opposite since figures like Healey and Jenkins continue to this day to straddle the labour movement. They will only be removed by correctly grasping the party's dual character: by supporting the Labour Party as a step forward in class consciousness in order, on the basis of that consciousness which still ties millions to the party, to operate a ruthless struggle against its reformist leaders.

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Whose Interests

Under a blaring headline (Get Out – and Join IS), Socialist Worker responded to the Prentice affair by quoting the comment of a new recruit from the Labour Party: "The Prentice thing is irrelevent. It might make some MPs shudder a bit, but it could also harden the right wing".[18] It would be difficult to find a clearer example of political short-sightedness. The dual character of the Labour Party – based on the workers' movement yet with an anti-working class leadership and programme – has created throughout its history constant *internal struggles* to resolve this contradiction. The periodic disputes between 'right' and 'left', of which the Prentice affair is merely one of the most recent examples, hold within them, in however distorted a form, the working out of this inner contradiction.

The fact that these disputes may often appear to be inter-bureaucratic in their initial stages may seem to remove them from the realms of the 'living' class struggle. Such a position, most evident in IS's worship of 'rank-and-filism' which has its roots in the syndicalist trends that developed prior to WWI, is politically immature. The Labour Party is not hermetically sealed off from social pressures. Inner conflict does not take place in a 'vacuum' separated from the class struggle in society as a whole. On the contrary, the disputes that continually arise reflect the clash inside the party of pressures from opposing class forces – those of the *workers' movement* and the *ruling class* – often mediated initially through different wings of the labour

A.J.Cook addressing mass May Day rally in 1926

bureaucracy.

Such pressures could be embryonically detected in the very founding of the Labour Party in the dispute between the SDF and the ILP over its future role and programme. The echoes of this initial conflict can be traced throughout Labour's history, creating shifts to the left or right. One has only to think, for example, of the struggles in the immediate post-war period which led to the imposition of Clause 4 in the Party Constitution or those in the late twenties between the left, backed up by the TUC, and the MacDonald leadership over unemployment, which resulted in the latter's split and participation in the 1931 coalition government.

During periods of relative quiescence, it is true, such conflicts tend to lie dormant as they have done throughout the post-war boom years (apart from the development of Bevanism which, uniquely enough, found its base not so much in the unions as in the constituency Labour Parties). In times of growing conflict, however, when the economic basis of reformism is eroded, they can become acute and pose ever more forcefully before millions of workers: is the Labour Party a party of the class – of the block votes of the unions which created it – or a party of 'all classes' reflecting some mythical 'national interest'?

At such times, the general tendency of the right-wing to 'liberate' the party from its class 'straightjacket' becomes more overtly posed. Wilson's use of the mythical national interest to impose the Social Contract (and, more recently, the 10% wage norm) is merely the latest variant of MacDonald's belief that the policies of the party should be in the interests of 'social solidarity' (and not 'class consciousness'). The attempt by the right to implement overtly capitalist policies, free even from a 'left' facade, comes into ever-sharper conflict, however, with the labour movement gradually trying to make 'its' party respond to its interests. These interests usually find a distorted and confused expression in the Labour 'left', usually composed of those trade union elements more susceptible to mass pressure.

These tendencies towards polarisation have, on certain occasions, led to splits as the pressures on the party reach critical pitch. The split of MacDonald, alongside Snowden and other Labour ministers, to join the coalition in 1931 was paralleled, a few years later, by that of the ILP to the left at a time when it could boast of over thirty MPs.

This is not to suggest that fragmentation is endemic to the history of the Labour Party or an immediate possibility, although we should not overlook the tensions that gave rise in the late sixties, around **In Place of Strife**, to trade union threats of disaffiliation or, more recently, the siren-calls from right-wingers such as Prentice for a 'national' government. The Labour Party has outlived many of its critics who forsaw its early demise in the large-scale internal polemics that have echoed through its history. It is merely to indicate that such tensions stem from class pressures on the party, expressed at different times and around different political issues, which are in the last resought *irreconcilable*.

Trotsky, in his analysis of the party just prior to the 1926 General Strike, was to indicate succinctly the roots of these tensions when suggesting that the labour movement "... is making every effort to create a [class] party, exerts pressure on the unions, pays political contributions. But this increasing pressure from below, from the shops and factories, the docks and mines, is opposed by a pressure from above, from the domain of official English policy with its national traditions ..."[19]

The only way this inner contradiction can be resolved, in the long term, is either by the reformist leaders breaking from the party's mass base, something that has occurred in certain European countries and which was encouraged by the Gaitskillite 'right' in the post-war years in its attack upon 'Clause 4': or by that mass base leading a relentless struggle against the leadership to create a party based upon its own class interests. The tensions and splits that have dogged Labour Party history

and which will deepen in the period ahead – represent merely the working out of this contradiction *which can be permanently settled only in the creation of a radically different kind of party, either way, from that which exists.*

b) Government and Party

Speaking on behalf of the Gaitskillite right-wing in the late fifties, Morgan Phillips stressed that the Parliamentary Labour Party must, to retain any 'credibility', be autonomous from any "outside body which, however representative of the party, could not be representative of the country".[20] Phillips' views, asserted during the polemic with the Bevanite left which had won a majority at party conference, are by no means gratuitous. The ongoing debate inside the Labour Party as to whether it represents the "interests of manual workers" or those of more "national scope" (as the Webbs defined it) finds expression not only politically but organisationally as well: i.e. not only in the party programme but also in its very structure.

The question as to whether the Parliamentary Labour Party is responsible to the party conference (the 'outside body' where the union block vote predominates) or to an amorphous electorate is the sharpest example of this debate. Phillip's views on the necessary autonomy of the PLP in determining policy are not unique but form part of an ongoing strategy by the 'right' which can be traced through to Harold Wilson's arrogant assertion in 1964 that it was not conference's 'function' to "dictate to the Parliamentary Labour Party, still less to a Labour Government". The insistence of the right upon this question is, of course, far from accidental but is a central plank in their continued control over the labour movement.

Autonomy from conference decisions represents, in the clearest possible way, autonomy from the class interests of the unions which founded the party and the attempt to turn it into the classless, radical party that was the Webbs' ambition, as early as 1918, in the Constitution he drafted. It allows the right the necessary 'flexibility' to prove to the ruling class that they are 'fit' for Her Majesty's Government, i.e. that the interests they will defend, when the chips are down, will be those of Parliamentary democracy and the 'national interest' and not those of the party's class base.

Needless to say, in this struggle, the right have always received the enthusiastic support of the ruling class which, through the mass media, has always come to their aid by counterposing the 'democratic' right of the MP to be guided by his/her conscience to the 'tyranny' exerted over the party by its mass base (the union block vote). In the early years, they tried to undermine the union's 'tyranny' (the potential danger of a party operating in the interests of a class) by direct legislation such as the Osborne Case of 1909 which prohibited the 'political levy'. When this failed, they adopted more ideological techniques as can be seen in the recent witch-hunt launched against the Newham Constituency Labour Party's decision to 'drop' Prentice for acting against conference decisions.

It is hardly surprising therefore that almost every single political struggle inside the Labour Party – from that over unemployment between Lansbury and MacDonald in the twenties to that over nationalisation between the Tribunite left and the Wilson leadership today – has been accompanied by the debate as to whether the PLP is responsible to the class interests of conference or to some 'supra-class' interest. As the labour movement slowly brings its pressure to bear inside the party, it comes into conflict not only with the class-collaborationist policies of the leadership but also with that leadership's undemocratic practices. The struggle for policies in the interests of labour, confused though they may initially be, becomes entwined with the struggle to create a democratic mechanism for implementing them. It is, after all, no use committing conference against incomes policy or attempts to legislate against the unions (as happened during the 1964-70 Labour governments) if that conference is powerless to control those MPs elected on its behalf.

The tendency to challenge the undemocratic practices of the labour bureaucracy has seen its most recent examples, of course, in the Newham CLP's decision to oust Prentice or Scargill's warning to NUM-sponsored MPs not to act against union interests. These are only the opening shots in an attempt at 'democratisation' of the party that will become more frequent and hard-hitting in the period ahead as the labour movement, confronted with the twin evils of unemployment and inflation, is increasingly forced into political action in defence of its interests. The reaction these most recent moves has prompted (both in the media and in Wilson's red-baiting tactics) is a sure indication of how dangerous they are seen to be to right-wing control over the party. Groups such as IS may dismiss them as 'irrelevent' but the Labour 'right' are not quite so myopic.

c) The Labour Left

It might appear strange, at first sight, that the Labour left, based more often than not on the unions whose block vote controls conference decisions, has found itself over the years incapable of challenging the right and posing an alternative strategy. The radicalisation of the labour movement almost always finds its political focus, in the initial stages, in the 'lefts' as the most recent example of Benn would seem to confirm.

The answer, however, is perhaps not quite as complex as it would seem. Writing over fifty years ago, Trotsky pointed out, when examining the relation between the lefts on the General Council and the MacDonald government, that "... the party cannot be restricted to various left ventures, but must have a generalised system of politics. The left-wingers have no such system, their very nature prevents this. The right-wingers have such a system; they have behind them tradition, experience, routine; and most important of all, bourgeois society as a whole is thinking for them and thrusts ready-made solutions under their noses". [21]

Jack Jones: architect of the Social Contract

Trotsky's comment almost has the air of an epitaph. It provides the essential clue why the left from Purcell and Hicks to Scanlon and Jones, acting under the mass pressure of their ranks, have been unable to provide an alternative perspective to that

of the official leadership. They can offer no alternative because, although verbally more radical than the MacDonalds or Wilsons, although shrinking away from the latters' clear anti-labour policies, they share the same *ideological premises* as they do: those of reformism. At a time when the only coherent alternative to the right-wing are socialist ones (which challenge the very nature of the system), reformist politics, however radical in words, are bound to lead to accepting attacks on working people.

Jack Jones may have been opposed, in the late sixties, to the imposition of a wage freeze as a solution to the problem of inflation. Lacking a clear socialist alternative, however, what could he possibly have posed as a viable challenge to Wilson's schemes? The fact that he had none is the reason why, only a few years later, he was forced into the position of being the ignominious architect of the Social Contract. Such an 'about-turn' does not result from personal weakness as from the ideology to which Jones adheres.

Lacking any alternative strategy to the right-wing, the lefts are thus continually forced, when placed into positions of responsibility, to implement those very policies they had previously drawn back from. Jack Jones, recently accepting the 10% wage norm, is not unique in this respect. Harold Wilson no less, who won his spurs alongside Nye Bevan in the fifties fighting against any idea of prescription charges, was the first Labour Prime Minister to introduce them. Michael Foot, bitterly opposed to Wilson's incomes policy in the sixties, is now sitting in the same government as the latter under the umbrella of the Social Contract.

While reflecting the mass pressure of the labour movement in the party, the left has historically been unable to give it a coherent political expression which can pose as a serious challenge to the right. Their inability at this level is expressed in their continued acceptance of the Parliamentary system as the sole political arena and refusal to mobilise support outside this arena – from the mass labour movement around a programme of struggle against the right wing. Recognising this does not, of course, prevent socialists supporting themwhen they do, on certain occasions, pioneer the interests of working people on concrete issues. The fact that certain MPs today, for example, have supported withdrawal of the troops from Ireland or opposed any restriction to abortion rights are cases in point.

Support on such concrete issues should not be used, however, as happened with certain marxist tendencies in the fifties[22] to foster any illusions that the lefts are capable of leading a serious struggle against the 'right' through to the bitter end. The recent collapse of large numbers of Tribunites, confronted with the government's 10% wage freeze, and the purely verbal opposition of others, is only another example in the party's 75 year-long history. The only way the radicalisation can be channelled into a struggle for a socialist alternative is by the creation of a marxist current (operating inside and outside the Labour Party), ready to collaborate with the lefts as far as they will champion the needs of working people and ready to go beyond them when necessity dictates. There is no reason to believe that many will not be won to a clear marxist position in the splits and radical re-alignments such a struggle will open up.

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Labour Post-war

a) Structural changes

Labour won the 1945 election on a landslide. Large sections of the working class were demanding radical change, as was reflected in the 1944 Annual Conference where a policy of 'large-scale nationalisations' was demanded. The morning after the election, or so it is rumoured, a rush on Wimbledon Post Office took place as frightened Tories ran to withdraw their money before the 'revolution' began. The Wimbledon Tories need not have worried. The Attlee government did, it is true, introduce under mass pressure serious reforms such as the National Health Service and the nationalisation of key industries such as coal, gas and the railways. These gains should not be under-estimated. Its central task was, however, to channel away the growing militancy of the labour movement and win its 'collaboration' in the 'national effort' to ressuscitate the economy.

Within six years, it had boosted the export trade from £920 millions to £2254 millions. A 'voluntary' incomes policy, holding wage increases down annually to 1%, coupled with nationalisation of these key service industries played a vital part in nursing the sick economy back to health. The post-war boom, made possible by the role of the Attlee government, was however to have long-term effects upon the development of the Labour Party itself in the years that followed.

Trotsky, in **Where is Britain Going,** pointed out the possible implications of the party if the employers did succeed in "reviving the economy, giving work to the unemployed and raising wages". It would, he suggested, give rise to certain tendencies chief among which would be a *growing conservatism in the unions* coupled with a *strengthening of the right-wing inside the Labour Party.*[23] While this variant appeared highly unlikely in the strike-torn years of the twenties, the post-war boom was to see exactly these tendencies developing.

The creation of the 'welfare state', full employment and the possibility of improving living standards through shop-floor militancy helped develop a 'fragmentation' and partial 'de-politicisation' of wide layers in the labour movement. While affiliated membership of the Labour Party grew during the boom years (particularly among new, white-collar unions),individual membership of active trade unionists tended to decrease sharply.

The lack of participation of trade union activists in the party, coupled with the fact that the large block votes of the unions had swung to the right under conditions of growing prosperity, enabled the right-wing to increasingly strengthen its hold. This growing power of the Labour bureaucracy, allowing figures such as Jay to evolve schemes to end trade union participation in the party because "we are in danger of fighting under the label of a class that no longer exists", was not insignificant. While the most obvious attempts to break the party from its class base were unsuccessful – Gaitskill's struggle to remove Clause 4 in 1960 was too much even for right-wing trade unionists like Boyd to accept – certain shifts were detectable.

In the first place, the growing shift to the right of the union block vote (the tripartite agreement) enabled the right-wing to create a greater autonomy of the PLP from conference decisions. This was particularly evident following the 'Attlee doctrine" in response to Churchill's attacks upon Laski and was, of course, helped by changes in the composition of the party.The latter could be detected most clearly in the PLP itself where, between 1951 and 1970, trade union MPs fell from 37 to 26% while professional members rose from 35 to 40%.

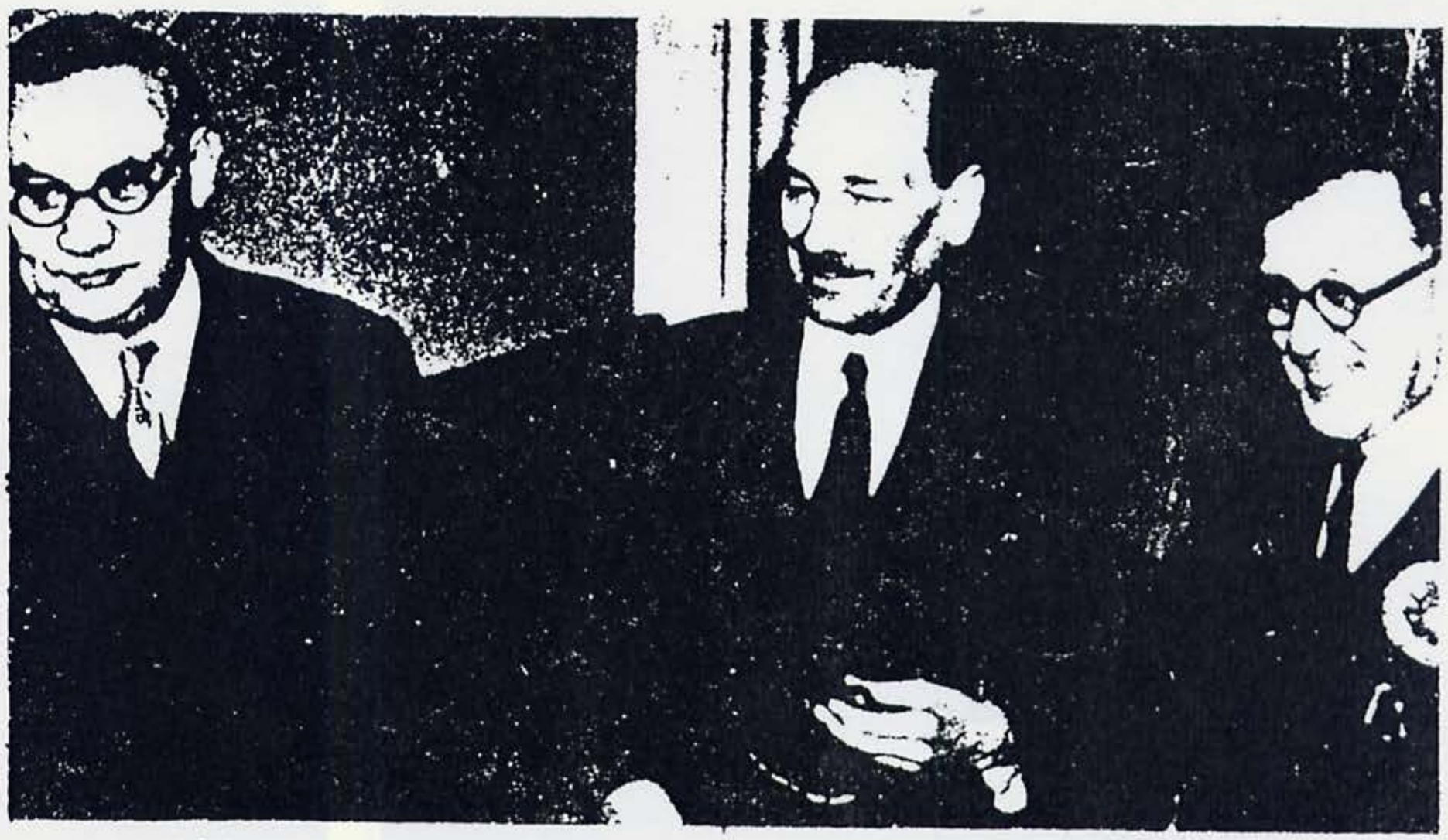
In the second place, there developed an increasing tendency for the labour right to identify themselves with the state machine and become integrated into it. While this was obviously related to changes in composition in the party, it should be

noted that it was not only figures like Robens and Marsh but also trade unionists like Paynter and Peel who ended up in state enterprises such as the Coal Board or the Railways. This trend, while not significant in itself, clearly reflects the identity the leadership feels with the system, dropping even the socialist terminology of the 'thirties.

In the third place, the growing autonomy of the PLP – coupled with the virulent anti-communism of the trade union right such as Deakin – placed growing curbs on democratic expression within the party. Originally, in its formative years, the Labour Party had not been a monolithic structure but a loose federation of trade union and socialist currents. The Webb Constitution of 1918, setting up local constituency parties dominated by an 'official' leadership, helped end the state of affairs. It created the monolithism within which the leadership could effectively 'ban' organisations politically opposed to it (as with the Communist Party in the twenties).

The Attlee 'bans and proscriptions' list – detailing numerous organisations refused affiliation rights – tightened still further the bureaucratic noose around the party's neck. While denying socialist tendencies the right to join the party, figures such as Prentice (launching virulent attacks upon the unions) are freely admitted.

The importance of these shifts – carried out through an alliance of the Labour and trade union 'right' such as Deakin and Williamson – is not that they altered, in any significant way, the relation of the party to its mass base. It is that they structured it in a way that was to influence the manner in which the radicalisation in the unions in the late sixties began to be expressed (when confronted with the Wilson offensive). These shifts, it should also be noted, could not only be detected in the Labour Party but in almost all Social-Democratic Parties throughout Europe in the post-war boom years.



Atlee: headed off the post-war radicalisation

b) The End of the Boom

The ending of the 'boom' could already be detected, in Britain, in the middle sixties when the 1963 mini-recession caused thousands of workers, protesting unem-

ployment nearing three-quarters of a million, to surround Parliament and adorn it with red flags. Such a reaction convinced the more astute sections of big business (speaking through such mouthpieces as the **Economist**) that the much needed shake-up of British industry could be more safely entrusted to Harold Wilson than to Harold MacMillan. They were re-assured by the 1964 Labour Manifesto which, omitting any talk about nationalisation, concentrated upon the need for 'modernisation' and 'vigour'.

They reckoned on the ability of Wilson to trade upon the traditional loyalty of the unions to push through this much-needed 'shake-up' necessary with entry to the EEC on the cards. Their perspective was not unjustified. Despite its set-backs (as over Barbara Castle's **In Place of Strife**), the Wilson government rolled up its sleeves and promoted government-sponsored 'mergers', a series of productivity deals and an absolute cut in living standards through a draconian wage freeze.

What was immediately noticeable was that the response to Wilson's offensive emerged initially not *inside* the Labour Party – among the traditional 'lefts' – but *outside* it. It was union leaders like Scanlon and Jones, under intense pressure from their members, who were forced to confront the government and fill the vacuum that had previously been filled by the Labour left (from Bevan back to Lansbury). The latter, grouped around **Tribune** which had originally supported Wilson's election policies, collapsed all too quickly and were unable to present any serious opposition to Wilson's measures. This collapse was both helped – and partly caused – by the fact that after 1965 a sixth of Labour activists quit in disgust at Wilson's policies (rising to a third in working class areas).

This unique situation, which led to wide-scale confrontations in the late sixties between government and unions, can only be understood within the developments of the post-war years. The fact that, throughout these years, union activists had retreated back from political issues into pure shop-floor militancy meant that 1) when confronted with Wilson's anti-labour policies, they looked in the initial stages to the unions rather than to the Labour lefts for leadership, and 2) that the Labour right-wing, unhampered by any serious opposition in the party, was free to pursue policies in the direct interests of big business.

This is not to downplay the mass actions that took place in the sixties against, for example, **In Place of Strife** which forced Wilson to abandon any hopes of implementing anti-union legislation. It is merely to point out that such struggles, in defence of democratic rights and living standards, never moved beyond defence of gains won to a political challenge to Wilsonism. This situation seriously confused the marxist left. The fact that wider and wider struggles were occuring – and finding no reflection in the Labour Party whose left was reduced to a rump – led to radically incorrect conclusions. It led primarily to the belief, still lingering among some sectarian groups such as IS, that the Labour movement was rapidly 'bypassing' the Labour Party and 'breaking from' its reformist control.

While such conclusions are understandable (coming from those with little experience of the labour movement) they were none the less radically false. Impressionism is no substitute for serious analysis. The fact that the labour movement was restricting itself to defensive struggles, unable to translate them into a political challenge to Wilson, meant that far from breaking from the reformist stranglehold they were as deeply held as ever. If anything, the outbreak of strikes in the late sixties was the initial response of layers of the labour movement which had, during the post war years, retreated from politics into localised industrial militancy. While prepared to struggle in their thousands, while combattive and confident after decades of rising living standards, they had no *political alternative* to Wilsonism. This is why, despite the treachery of the Wilson government, over eleven million continued to vote Labour in 1970 and, four years later, return a minority Labour government to power.

The calls by such groups as the IMG to 'abstain' in the 1970 elections were, in this sense, totally misguided. Such calls were made in the belief that growing sectors of the labour movement were 'breaking' politically from the Labour Party. They weren't. They were merely in the first stages of a radicalisation that was bound, as time developed, to find a reflection in the Labour Party *since there exists no other framework where the labour movement can, at present, politically express itself.*

Although this process has taken some time – and is only now in its embryonic stages – that is precisely what has begun to happen. As the discontent and militancy grows in the coming years, it will increasingly make its pressure felt inside the Labour Party itself at a political level. The dangers are that such groups as the IMG, adapting to ultra-left pressures in the past, will adapt to opportunist ones in the period ahead.

c) Tendencies ahead

The growing radicalisation of the labour movement under Heath's offensive in the early seventies – particularly around the miners' strike – has already begun to make an impact upon sections of the party. This process has been accelerated by the coming to power of Labour in 1974 in a situation where class tensions are growing ever more acute. The polarisation that has developed under these tensions – between figures such as Benn and Jenkins/Prentice – should not be over-exaggerated. Nevertheless it does reflect a growing crisis in the party as different class pressures pull it in different directions. It is already beginning to find important (if confused) programmatic expression in the debates, during the past few conferences, over nationalisation, incomes policy and workers' control.

Under the blows of the crisis, these political differences will put the unity of the party under a severe strain. Cracks are already beginning to appear. The talk of a 'national government' by the right-wing are the logical development of sections of the party to espouse openly capitalist solutions to the present crisis and who feel more and more inhibited by the party's class base. This is the reason for the attacks, by figures such as Prentice, upon the "sillier forms of trade unionism".

The Benn development – a broader left current including the older Tribunite force whose origins lie with the Bevanites – is basically a reflection in the party of the pressure of the unions. While Benn personally has no organic roots in the union movement (sic), his social base lies clearly in reflecting and defending TUC opinion. In this sense, the development of the left at present potentially differs significantly from that in the fifties which had its roots not so much in the unions as in the constituency Labour Parties.

Up to the present, it is true, despite the 'left' image he has received and his houndings in the press, Benn has consistently refused to advocate clear socialist policies as an alternative to Wilson. His position on workers' control is a smokescreen to smuggle in 'workers' participation' (encouraging unions to identify with the profitability of private enterprise). His work on the National Enterprise Board was not so much a means of extending public ownership as using vast reserves of public expenditure to prop up 'lame ducks'. His opposition to the EEC was conducted (as was the whole campaign) in a narrow, nationalistic spirit which counterposed the viability of British capitalism to co-operation in Europe.

The fact that Benn has received a far more radical image than his policies represent does not mean, however, as the pressure of the unions increases in the coming period, that he could not move further to the left. This is indeed possible since he already represents, *in however distorted and confused a form*, the political evolution of growing numbers in the labour movement hesitatingly seeking an opposition to Wilson. This is an important point. The fact that there does not exist in Britain a revolutionary party capable of politically centralising the struggles that will develop – and giving them a clear perspective – means that the Labour left can increasingly

pose as a political focus in the period ahead.

The development of centrist currents in the Labour Party – representing the growing radicalisation of layers outside – is not inevitable. Lacking any alternative political perspective, however, due to the weakness of the revolutionary left and strength of reformism within the workers' movement, such a perspective seems likely. The strategy of the Communist Party, seeking an alliance with the Labour lefts whom they have been wooing for decades, would seem to add to the likelihood of this varient.

How and at what tempo this would develop is impossible to predict. As the Labour government is more and more forced, however, to introduce anti-Labour policies to 'solve' the crisis, the pressure on the party from its mass base will be deepened as happened recently when over thirty Tribunites were 'compelled' to vote against the 10% norm

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Which Way for Labour

a) The Confusion of the Left

In an editorial in **Socialist Worker** (Sept 20th), taking up the implications of the Prentice affair once again, the paper pointed out that Prentice is not unique since the Labour Party "breeds Prentices all the time; big Prentices, stupid and clever Prentices, Prentices in parliament and Prentices in town halls". Castigating those who may still hold illusions in the Labour Party, the same editorial continues that the only way to break the power of the Prentices within the labour movement is to "build a new workers party, based on different principles to those of the Labour Party and that means a revolutionary party".

There could be few on the left today who could disagree with such sentiments. Such a position, however, glosses over the key problem facing marxists today – a problem that has faced them ever since the creation of the Labour Party – which is exactly *how* is this 'revolutionary party' going to be built? It is one thing to say that the Labour Party is totally unable to respond to the needs of the workers' movement (and its allies) because of the dominance within it of figures such as Prentice. It is quite another thing to convince millions of people, those millions who still have illusions in the Labour Party, who vote for it and support it, that this is the case and that only a 'revolutionary party' will solve their needs.

The task of socialists today is not to utter platitudes about the need to break the dominance of reformist leaders, from MacDonald to Prentice, over the labour movement. It is more urgent. It is to devise a strategy *that will break this dominance*, a strategy which, based upon the existing level of consciousness of millions of workers, will lead them into struggle with their reformist mis-leaders. Unfortunately, when it comes to concretely putting forward such a strategy, the marxist left are curiously disarmed. The disorientation they have undergone over the past period has made them singularly ill-equipped to come to grips with such a problem today and take advantage of the very real possibilities opening up.

Lack of a long-term orientation towards the Labour Party, founded in a grasp of its dual nature, has meant that in the confused and complex developments of the past decade they have been buffeted in all directions. They have, above all, found themselves unable to link up in any real way the mass struggles beginning to develop outside the party – struggles not only in the unions but among other strata – with those emerging inside the Labour Party against the right-wing. It has led them to fall into the same vices that have traditionally characterised the marxist left: a sectarian abstention on the one hand (as in the case of IS) and, on the other, a tacit adaption to the Labour Party and its reformist outlook.

Tendencies such as the **Militant**, convinced of the importance of remaining in the Labour Party where mass struggles would 'inevitably' reflect themselves, ignored the whole process of radicalisation that occurred in the late sixties. Transforming the tactic of entry into a principle, they were thus cut off from the living struggles and confined to party wards where they conducted little more than a paper fight: passing pious resolutions unconnected with the real issues drawing thousands into action on the streets and in the factories.

Such tendencies, acting in a rigid and ultra-formal way, were thus outside (from the beginning) the mass Vietnam rallies, the development of the women's liberation movement and the student upsurge of the past period, not to speak of the struggles inside the unions. They sacrificed the living struggles as they were unfolding, often in a complex and uneven way, to a paper concept of struggle. Their refusal to take up and pioneer any of these issues – particularly, today, the issue of building a mass action campaign to get the troops out of Ireland – is a sure sign of their adaption to

the backward and arid traditions of the labour bureaucracy whom they have refused to challenge in a principled way.

Unlike Militant, tendencies such as the **International Marxist Group** showed a much more healthy attitude in that they participated in such movements from the beginning. Participation, however, soon led to the ultra-left positions of many of the radicalised layers they were involved with whose understanding of the labour movement was negligeable and who, in a simplistic way, could only see the 'negative' side of the Labour Party. The 'abstentionist' position put forward by Robin Blackburn (for the IMG) in 1970, based on the premise that it was scarcely distinguishable from the Tories, was the practical fruit of this adaptionism.

This ultra-left position, shared to a large extent by the **International Socialists**, was a serious error in that it served only to confuse, and not clarify, the layers of radicalised youth in the need to view their struggles as part of an overall strategy towards the Labour Party to break its reformist stranglehold over the class. It showed clearly that such groups had no long-term orientation towards the Party which could link the struggles on the streets, among different stratas, with the necessary struggle inside the labour movement against the Labour leaders. Such a lack of perspective, which naively held that the growing struggles could somehow 'bypass' the Labour Party without the need of a conscious struggle against its mis-leaders, has had a lasting effect upon these groups who find themselves increasingly unable to come to grips with current developments.

Lacking a clear orientation has already led the IMG to change and alter its positions at an often bewildering rate over the years. If IS still retains its former sectarian positions – oblivious to the growing importance of developments in the party as the pressure of the labour movement is slowly brought to bear upon it – the IMG has been buffetted about like a weathercock. Abstentionism in 1970 has been followed by zigzags, this way and that, as the IMG tries, empirically, to relate to the latest shifts in mood. Most recently, this empirical adaptation has led to an evolution to the 'right'. Evolution to the right is often not a bad thing in the case of ultra-lefts. The only danger is that they often are not too sure where to stop and the ogres of yesteryear can become the friends of today, as seemed to be the case, only recently, in the IMG's almost uncritical support for Bennism.

A clear orientation towards the Labour Party, *one which combines an ability to link the ongoing struggles with growing opposition in the labour movement against the reformist leaders*, is more important today than ever before. Unfortunately, the marxist left approaches the period with little more clarity than did the early socialist groupings, only going to prove that history can sometimes repeat itself with deadly irony.

b) Labour to Power on a Socialist Programme

In the coming years, ever-wider layers of the trade union movement will be thrust into struggle to defend living standards and democratic rights. The large-scale, erratic eruptions over the past period, from the miners' strikes to mass action to 'free the five', will become more frequent and explosive. They will add a powerful impetus to those struggles already underway among other stratas of society – particularly those of women or the black community – and give them a centralising focus.

Such struggles, increasingly generalising the consciousness of ever-wider layers, will begin to pose ever more forcefully the need for *political solutions* to problems facing not, as in the past, sectors of the labour movement but the labour movement as a whole. Because the vast majority of the ranks of the trade union movement still retain their political allegiance to the Labour Party, the attempt to hammer out such political solutions will increasingly be posed within the Labour Party itself (as is already beginning to happen). In order to ensure that such a process is not hegemonised

by the reformist leadership (of either a right or left variety), it is important that socialists intervene in it with a clear understanding of what the Labour Party represents in terms of the consciousness of the labour movement.

The fact that the Labour Party was created by the unions – and still retains the political allegiance of the vast majority – means that socialists stand unconditionally for a victory of Labour over the Tories. This support is not a grudging support, as in the case of tendencies such as IS which play down the differences between the parties, but an identification with the gain the Labour Party represents in the understanding of working people of the need for an independent political voice.

The struggles of working people with Labour in power are posed more favourably in two ways. First of all, because of its organic links with the unions, it is limited in the extent to which it can erode past gains. **In Place of Strife**, let us remember, was defeated by trade union action whereas the Tories **Industrial Relations Act** was not, despite the mini-general strikes called against it. In the second place, election of Labour allows working people to go through a concrete experience of their reformist leaders (free of the 'left talk' that often occurs when they are in opposition) and poses the possibility of shifts to the left by certain layers (as is now happening).

Support for the Labour Party as a step forward towards independent political action is by no means the same, however, as support for its programme which is a tool in the hands of the class enemy. While identifying with the mass base of the Labour Party – the eleven million who vote for and support it – socialists counterpose to the programme of its leaders one based upon the real needs of working people and their allies. It is by supporting Labour and, at the same time, demanding that it implement a programme in the interests of working people, that ever-wider layers will come into conflict with the reformist leaders and see the need for an alternative one. This long term orientation, based upon the current understanding of the majority of the labour movement who still support Labour and leading them, through their own experience, to see the need to go beyond it, is summarised in the call **Labour to Power on a Socialist Programme**.

It has been argued by some tendencies (notably the IMG in the past) that such an orientation creates illusions in the possibility of the reformist leaders actually being able to introduce socialist measures. Such an argument, apparently convincing, misses the point. The majority of working people already have such illusions, already believe that (perhaps with a change of leadership substituting Benn for Wilson) the party can be 'pressurised' into implementing demands in their interests. The development of Bennism over the past few years is an embryonic example of this process at work. Explaining the inability of Labour to respond to the needs of working people – important though this is for socialists – is not sufficient in itself to destroy these illusions. Only concrete experience itself can begin to accomplish this.

The aim of such an orientation, taking the present level of consciousness of the labour movement as its starting point, is to show increasing layers through such concrete experience precisely that the labour bureaucrats are incapable of implementing demands in their interests because they are ideologically wedded to the present system. The way to do this is not by ignoring the Labour Party or sectarianly denouncing it from the sidelines, as do groups such as IS. It is by directing mass action towards it and calling upon its leaders – who claim to represent working people and who still retain the allegiance of the majority – to implement demands in their interests.

By directing such mass action towards the Labour Party, around concrete issues, a wedge is driven between the illusions working people still retain in the Labour leaders and the struggles they are involved in around demands the Labour leaders cannot and will not implement. It is on the concrete experience of the inability of the

Wilsons – or Benns – to respond to their demands that ever-wider layers will begin to see the need for a socialist alternative. This will not take place overnight but will, undoubtedly, be the result of a long process of struggle both outside and inside the Labour Party.

It has been objected by certain tendencies that such a process is redundant because the Labour leaders already stand exposed before wide sections of the trade union movement. Trotsky already answered this 'objection' long ago when referring to the positions of the Independent Labour Party. "It is argued", he wrote, "that the Labour Party already stands exposed by its past deeds in power and its present reactionary platform. For us – yes! But not for the masses, the eight millions who voted Labour!"[24] Trotsky was writing during the chronic depression of the "thirties when, with over two million unemployed, the MacDonald government had actually cut the dole. It is a great danger for marxists (particularly inexperienced ones) to attribute to the mass movement their own understanding or that of a very thin, radicalised layer.

While it is true that large layers of the labour movement, and outside, are deeply disillusioned with the Wilson leadership, as they previously were with the MacDonald leadership, this in no way signifies that they have politically broken free from the type of politics Wilson represents: that of reformism which has deep roots in the labour movement. If they had, over eleven million workers would not have voted Labour at the last election and figures such as Callaghan or Jenkins would no longer 'lead' (or rather 'mislead') the labour movement. The only way for them to break free of such politics is through a political struggle against these leaders which will, in the process, educate them in the need for a qualitatively different kind of party. There is no substitute for such a struggle.

c) Mass Action

The attempt to take growing layers through a concrete struggle with the reformist leaders is not, however, a propaganda exercise as in the case of the Militant group (restricting itself to passing pious resolutions) but has its roots in living struggles themselves on the streets and in the factories. It is one thing to call upon the Labour leaders to withdraw the troops from Ireland from the relative isolation of a ward meeting. It is quite another to do so on the basis of mass action in the streets (action mobilising tens of thousands) which can serve as the basis for such calls within the Labour Party.

The demand **Labour to Power on a Socialist Programme** is not, in this sense, a paper resolution substituting for mass action but stems directly out of such action. Such an orientation has to be concretely filled out, at each step, in accord with the living struggles working people and their allies are involved in around demands socialists consciously fight for in the mass movement. Such demands should include those stemming from the struggle by women for their liberation such as that recently pioneered by the National Abortion campaign, those by black people against racism and anti-imperialist struggles such as that launched by the TOM to withdraw the troops immediately from Ireland.

Such demands should also include, of course, those in defence of the democratic rights and living standards of the labour movement which will be increasingly threatened as the crisis deepens. "A sliding scale of wages" should be raised to fight inflation, a "Bold Public works programme" coupled with a "Sliding Scale of hours" to meet growing unemployment. Closures and redundancies should be met with calls for "Nationalisation under Workers' Control" (particularly by workers occupying the plants). Attacks upon the unions' independence should be met by "Hands off the Unions" and attacks on the freedom of collective bargaining by "No Wage freeze".

It is by participating in and building mass actions around clear anti-capitalist demands, and directing these movements towards the Labour Party, that increasing layers will be confronted *on the basis of struggle* with the limitations of the latter and begin to grasp the need for a socialist alternative. Directing these movements towards the Labour Party, which allows the apparently fragmented and disconnected struggles to find a common 'focal point', does not however signify subordination to 'electoralism' or to 'parliamentary procedure'. On the contrary. It is by encouraging at all times independent mass action, and demanding that the Labour leaders implement demands stemming from such action, that ever-wider layers will begin to see through the reformists whose allegiance is more to a system based on private enterprise than to the interests of its mass base.

To demand that Labour implement a socialist programme is not, therefore, to harbour any illusions that this is possible – although many groups under-estimate the extent to which, under mass pressure, sections of the party may move to the left and may possibly be won to a clear socialist position. The fact that Ramsay MacDonald toured the country in 1917 calling for the creation of 'soviets', under severe pressure from the labour movement deeply inspired by the Russian Revolution, is an indication of how far even the bureaucracy will go, *verbally*, at times.

The reformists will not implement such a programme because that would mean making inroads into the capitalist system materially or, as in the case of the recent campaign to extend abortion rights for women, ideologically as well. This they will not do since it would mean the miraculous transformation of the reformist into the revolutionary. The history of the labour movement does not encourage a belief in miracles. The call **Labour to Power on a Socialist Programme** is designed to take layers of working people through a concrete experience of the limits of reformism: it is designed to break the stranglehold grip of reformism over the labour movement by showing, in practice, its inability to 'deliver the goods'.

It is here precisely, of course, that the Communist Party makes its fundamental 'error'. For socialists, calling upon Labour to implement socialist policies is a bridge demand between the consciousness of the labour movement which sees reforms as possible within the present system and a consciousness which sees the need to win these demands by challenging the system. For the bridge, the Stalinists substitute a barrier. Their slogan 'Labour to Power with Left Policies', far from breaking layers from parliamentary illusions, reinforces them by suggesting the possibility of a left Labour government implementing socialist policies by winning a 'majority in Parliament, supreme organ of representative power', (sic)

d) Work in the Labour Party

The development of mass struggles in the period ahead, finding a focal point in the Labour Party, will almost certainly find a reflection inside it. This has already begun to take place, quite spontaneously, in actions like that of the Newham CLP's to drop Prentice as its parliamentary candidate or Scargill's recent warning to NUM-sponsored MPs. Both of these developments represent part of a trend that will undoubtedly grow in the coming period.

Unlike the **International Socialists**, such incidents are not to be dismissed as 'irrelevent' but seen as an important development inside the labour movement as layers begin to seek a political solution to the problems they are increasingly facing. Such developments, reflecting broader shifts in consciousness outside the party, should be consciously participated in by socialists as part of directing the growing struggles into a political opposition to the Labour leaders. Struggling inside the Labour Party does not mean, however, imitating the passive tradition of tendencies such as **Militant** which limits itself to a verbal and ineffective opposition. It means

Foot: refused to challenge the Social Contract

pioneering the struggles outside the party – those of the women's liberation movement,the black community or the unions – inside the party and ensuring they are not headed off by 'right' or 'left' wings.

The aim of creating such a political opposition is not merely to reflect but also, in turn, to help promote, mass action outside the party. It is through the interaction of mass action outside and a current reflecting this action programmatically within the party that the hegemony of the labour leaders can begin to be successfully broken down and a concrete alternative posed before the entire labour movement.

It is, at the same time, only by linking up the struggles inside the party with those outside that socialists can, simultaneously, begin to undermine the undemocratic practices of the labour bureaucracy which has, in the past, used the expulsion clause to free itself of all opposition. Only when the struggles in the party are rooted in the struggles of hundreds of thousands outside – and are backed by such forces – can the challenge to the class-collaborationist policies and undemocratic practices of the labour bureaucrats assume any perspective. It also allows socialists to avoid the other danger confronting the marxist movement in the past (and by **Militant** today), an inclination towards concealing one's true positions for fear of expulsion by the 'right'.

The struggles in the party around clear political issues – reflecting those outside as, for example, that currently taking place around the right of women to free abortion on demand – should be complemented by struggles to democratise the party. It should be demanded that all bans and proscriptions end so that every socialist tendency, claiming to represent a stream of working class opinion, be free to exercise its views. It should also be demanded that the **BLP** implement conference decisions and, if MPs refuse to abide by these decisions, that they be called to account. Likewise, trade-union sponsored MPs should be unceremoniously dismissed if they act in a manner detrimental to the interests of the unions.

Such struggles, political and organisational, complement those taking place outside the party. They are not entered into in a belief that the Labour Party will implement a socialist programme or that it can be democratised. It will not and it cannot be. They are entered into to show growing layers of working people that, while the Labour Party is a step forward, it is not sufficient to fulfill their interests. Thousands, if not millions, will not discover this by being lectured at. They will begin to discover it in the course of active struggle to make the Labour Party act in their interests. It is out of this struggle, out of the splits and re-alignments that will take place as part of this struggle, that a new form of party will be forged, one based upon the clear interests of working people and their allies and one which is prepared to challenge this system to realise those interests: a revolutionary party.

NOTES

1. Leon Trotsky. *'Problems of the British Labour Movement'*. (Jan. 13th, 1926)
2. In *'Where is Britain Going'*, Trotsky placed the origin of the Labour Party in a ". . profound change in the situation of England; its weakening in the world market, the alteration of its economic structure, the elimination of the middle classes, the downfall of Liberalism".
3. In 1885 recorded membership of the TUC stood at 631 000
4. Henry Pelling. *'A Short History of the Labour Party'* 'As Professor Asa Briggs has shown, it was more usual to refer to the 'labouring classes' or the 'middle classes' in the plural, thus recognising the variety to be found under each description.
5. It was, indeed, the growth of the Engineering Employers' Federation in 1897 that was responsible for the first 'lock-our'.
6. The Taff Vale Judgement had such an impact upon the trade union movement that, between 1901 and 1902, trade union affiliation to the LRC almost doubled (from 455,450 to 847,315).
7. Both the Independent Labour Party and the 'marxist' Social-Democratic Federation were original sponsors of the LRC.
8. Robin Blackburn's article 'Let it Bleed' (*Red Mole* No 3) was later disavowed by the author who, in the *New Statesman* (14th September 1973), went so far in the opposite direction as to call for a 'unity of the left' including leftward-moving forces in the Labour Party.
9. V. I. Lenin. *The Session of the International Socialist Bureau'*. (Vol XII).
10. Leon Trotsky. *'On the Labour Party'*. (1938) 'Only after a hundred years did the trade unions begin to build up a political party. This is absolutely contrary to Germany or Austria. There the party awakened the working class and built up the trade unions. . . '.
11. Brian Pearce. *'Some Past Rank and File Movements'*. 'These trade union leaders saw their task as essentially one of peaceful negotiation with the employers and this gave rise to a whole network of social relations separating them off from their original class. Assured of a permanent position with a secure income, the trade union officials – 'a closely combined and practically irresistable bureaucracy' as the Webbs called them in their book *'Industrial Democracy'* – soon found their different life-experience reflected in a different outlook on the class struggle'.
12. In *'Internationalist Socialist'* 43, Peter Sedgwick pinpointed the trends 'within British Social-Democracy which have converted the party from a distorted expression of Labour ism into an open agency of capitalist rule'.
13. Leon Trotsky. *'Where is Britain Going'*.
14. Clause 4 called for the party 'to secure for the producers by hand and brain the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service'.

15. Marx and Engels. *'On the Labour Party'.* Lenin was to echo Marx and Engels criticism of Hyndeman's SDF for 'acting in a sectarian spirit and failing to attach themselves to the unconscious, but powerful, class interests of the trade unions, and in transforming Marxism into a dogma whereas it should serve as a guide to action'.
16. V. I. Lenin. In his *'Speech on the Role of the Communist Party, July 23'*, Lenin actually advocated splitting with those sectarian forces in the CP which refused the 'correct tactic' of affiliation to the Labour Party.
17. V. I. Lenin. *'Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder'.*
18. *Socialist Worker*
19. Leon Trotsky. *'Where is Britain Going'.*
20. Phillip's views were merely an echo of those originally expressed by Keir Hardie himself who pointed out that 'In the House of Commons the membership of the party decide their own policy without interference from the Executive or any outside authority'.
21. Leon Trotsky. *'Problems of the British Labour Movement'.* (January 7th, 1926).
22. The present WRP, whose sectarian positions are well-known, originated out of the 'Group', a tendency working inside the Labour Party in the fifties whose main characteristic was that it was often indistinguishable from the left-centrist whose paper (' Tribune') it used to sell.
23. Leon Trotsky. *'Where is Britain Going'.*

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Appendix

The 'workers government' question.

The slogan 'Labour to power on a Socialist Programme' has been known, in the past, to produce a severe case of apoplexy in certain left tendencies. The reasons for this are obscure since it has a long tradition within the marxist movement. It is a *concretisation* of the 'workers' government' tactic first developed, in a serious way, at the Third Congress of the Third International.

Such a tactic was raised as part of a general polemic by leading figures in the International (notably Lenin and Trotsky) against the ultra-left leanings of a layer of new recruits throughout Europe who had joined after the Russian Revolution.

The main aim of this polemic was to convince the younger (and more inexperienced) members of the need to apply careful tactics to win to the Communist Parties those workers – the vast majority – still loyal to the reformist parties: an indispensable task before the question of a struggle for power could be posed.

Lenin's *'Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder'*, written as part of this polemic, took up in particular the serious errors of the young British Communist Party in its ultra-left attitude towards the Labour Party.

The concept of the 'workers government' was originally raised within the framework of the 'united front' tactic. The united front, as outlined by Trotsky, was specifically posed in those countries where the Communist Parties were followed by a minority of the workers' movement. The aim of the tactic – of calling for unity in action with the reformist parties around concrete issues – was twofold.

In the first place, it was to create the maximum unity of the workers' movement in its day-to-day struggles since, as Trotsky stresses 'any party which mechanically counterposes itself to this need of the working class for unity in action will unfailingly be condemned in the minds of the workers. .'

In the second place, it was to take those workers still loyal to the reformist parties through a concrete experience of the 'lack of real will to struggle on the part of the reformists' and thus gradually draw them to the Communist Party itself.

The demands around which such unity in action would be posed would not be those 'cunningly' devised to 'expose' the reformists but those stemming from the real needs of the workers' movement and its allies. The struggle around real issues would, in itself, be sufficient to reveal the reformists' weakness and vacillation.

The 'workers' government' was originally posed as a continuation of the 'united front' tactic at governmental level. Where the Communist Party was itself too weak to seize power, it would call upon other workers' parties to form a government, independent of the ruling class parties, around a clear programme in the interests of the workers' movement.

Trotsky, in his debate with the sectarian positions of the young French Communist Party in the 1920s, explained it succinctly: "At a suitable time, prepared for us by events and by our own propaganda, we shall address ourselves to the working masses who still reject the revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, or who have not matured enough for these questions, and speak to them as follows: 'You can see how the bourgeoisie is preparing its own class unity. Why shouldn't we, the workers, belonging to different parties and to different tendencies create, together with non-party workers, our own proletarian bloc in defence of our interests?'.."

This idea of a 'workers' government' was not, it should be made clear, necessarily on the cards in all countries. It would not be posed, for example, in countries where the reformist parties were weak or where the Communist Party had a majority following in the workers' movement. In those countries, however, where the reformist parties had deep roots and traditions in the working class (as in Britain with its monolithic Labour Party), it was considered a likely stage the workers' movement would pass through before throwing off its reformist leadership.

Whether revolutionaries participated in such a government would depend (apart from size) upon whether they could gain agreement with the reformist parties around a given programme of demands which would make that government a truly workers' government (i.e. one prepared to implement an anti-capitalist programme).

Such a government did emerge in Germany in 1923 when the Communist Party secured agreement (temporarily) with the Socialist Party and the Independent Social-Democratic Party. Such a government, defended by Lenin against the 'ultra-lefts' who considered it a 'compromise', was based it should be stressed upon a clear programme of demands including 'higher pensions', 'elimination of unemployment', 'introduction of factory and strike committees' etc.

If the revolutionaries were too weak to participate in such a government (or even propose one), it would still call upon those parties claiming to represent workers' interests to form a government on a programme based on these interests. The small Ligue Communiste in France in the 1930s, for example, called for a workers' government of the Socialist and Communist Parties (a 'Blum-Cachin' government) based around demands stemming from the struggles of the workers' movement itself.

It was, in general, not expected that a united-front government made up of reformist parties could become a true workers' government (i.e. implement an anti-capitalist programme), although the possibility was not definitively excluded. Trotsky, in the *'Transitional Programme'* of 1938, pointed out that ". . under the influence of exceptional circumstances (war, defeat, financial crash, mass revolutionary pressure), the petty-bourgeois parties including the Stalinists may go further than they themselves wish along the road to a break with the bourgeoisie".

This is indeed what happened in the case of Cuba and China where workers and peasants governments were established by such forces which, under 'exceptional conditions', did implement an anti-capitalist programme.

Nevertheless, while such possibilities were not ruled out, they were considered to be most unlikely. History has, in general, confirmed this. The main aim of raising the call for a 'workers' government' was twofold. It was first to create the maximum unity of the workers' movement independent from the ruling class, and, secondly, to take layers of workers still loyal to the reformists through a concrete experience of the latters' inability to conduct a real struggle in their interests.

Trotsky explained this dual aim in his debate with the same French Communist Party in the 1920s: ". . the slogan of a Workers' Government thus becomes a wedge driven between the working class and all other classes by the communists; and insofar as the top circles of Social-Democracy, the reformists, are tied up with the bourgeoisie, this wedge will act more and more to tear, as it is already beginning to tear, the left wing of the Social-Democratic workers from their leaders".

The aim of the workers' government tactic is, in this sense, relatively clear-cut. Calling upon the reformists to form such a government around a clear anti-capitalist programme is not to entertain any illusions that they will implement such a programme. It is to take layers of the labour movement, still loyal to such parties, through a concrete experience of their limitations.

The slogan thus possesses what Trotsky called 'tremendous educational value' since it puts the reformist parties, who claim to represent the interests of the workers' movement, to a concrete test before the eyes of their own followers. Demanding that such parties form a government and, at the same time, developing 'agitation around those transitional demands which should . . form the programme of the workers and farmers' government' puts them on the spot before their own followers who are faced with problems that can only be solved through clear anti-capitalist measures.

Those tendencies today who claim that placing demands upon the Labour Party (demanding it come to power on a 'socialist programme') leads to illusions in the reformist leaders do not grasp the methodology behind such an orientation. It is necessary to convince those layers who still retain illusions in the reformists that the latter operate against their interests not through mere denunciation but through concrete experience.

It is only by calling for the reformist parties to form a government on the basis of the anti-capitalist demands pioneered by the mass movement – including their own followers – that it is possible to 'expose their treacherous character', as Trotsky put it, and win layers closer to a socialist position.

The aim of such a slogan has, in this sense, a 'bridge quality' to it. It takes those layers of workers who still believe that the demands they are struggling for can be implemented *within* the present system – through the 'reformist' parties – to grasp that such demands can only be won by breaking from such parties and struggling *against* the system itself.

The demand thus poses the question of power in a transitional way. Calling upon the reformist leaders to implement the anti-capitalist demands around which masses are mobilised is a call upon them, concretely, to make inroads into the capitalist system. The fact that the reformists will not implement such a programme shows layers (who still have illusions in the reformists) that the reason why they did not implement their demands is precisely because they refuse to break out of such a framework.

This is the reason why Pierre Frank quite correctly describes the 'workers' government' as the 'culminating slogan' of all these other demands and, at the same time, shows that they can only be implemented by the formation of a government that will challenge the very nature of the system.

The need for such a slogan was never more urgent than – to take a burning contemporary issue – in the case of Portugal. The key task of revolutionaries in that situation was (and is) to call for a workers government (encompassing the Communist Party and the Socialist Party), independent of the military, around a programme stemming from the real demands of the Portugese workers.

In this way, the call for such a government would be a call for the independence of the workers movement and, at the same time, would take those workers loyal to the parties through a concrete experience of the latter's bankruptcy and pose the need for a revolutionary solution.

The 'workers' government' slogan, as debated at the Third Congress of the Third International, was posed in an 'algebraic' way. It was a slogan which 'preserves under all conditions a tremendous educational value' but which has to be concretised according to the very real circumstances existing in different countries.

Such a slogan was concretised in Germany, for example, in 1923, in the call for a CP-SP-SDP government or, in France, in the thirties for a CP-SP-CGT government. In Britain, this slogan was concretised by the British Communist Party around the formulation of a Labour Government implementing socialist policies.

What exactly is the methodology in such an orientation? The first task before socialists is to drive what Trotsky called a 'wedge' between the workers' movement and the ruling class. Since the Labour Party has a virtual monopoly over the labour movement (and represented in its formation a united front of workers' organisations), socialists stand unequivocally for a victory of Labour over the Tories.

It is not enough, however, merely to support Labour. It is equally important to bring that party to power in a situation in which increasing layers of the labour movement (who retain their traditional loyalty to it) can go through an experience of its 'treacherous character'. This cannot be done passively. It can only be done by placing upon the party a series of demands stemming from the real needs of working people and their allies around which mass action is developing.

It is by the dual task of both supporting Labour and calling upon it to implement demands in the interests of the workers' movement that increasing layers will begin to go through a concrete experience with the party, an active experience, that will begin to break the grip of reformism over them.

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